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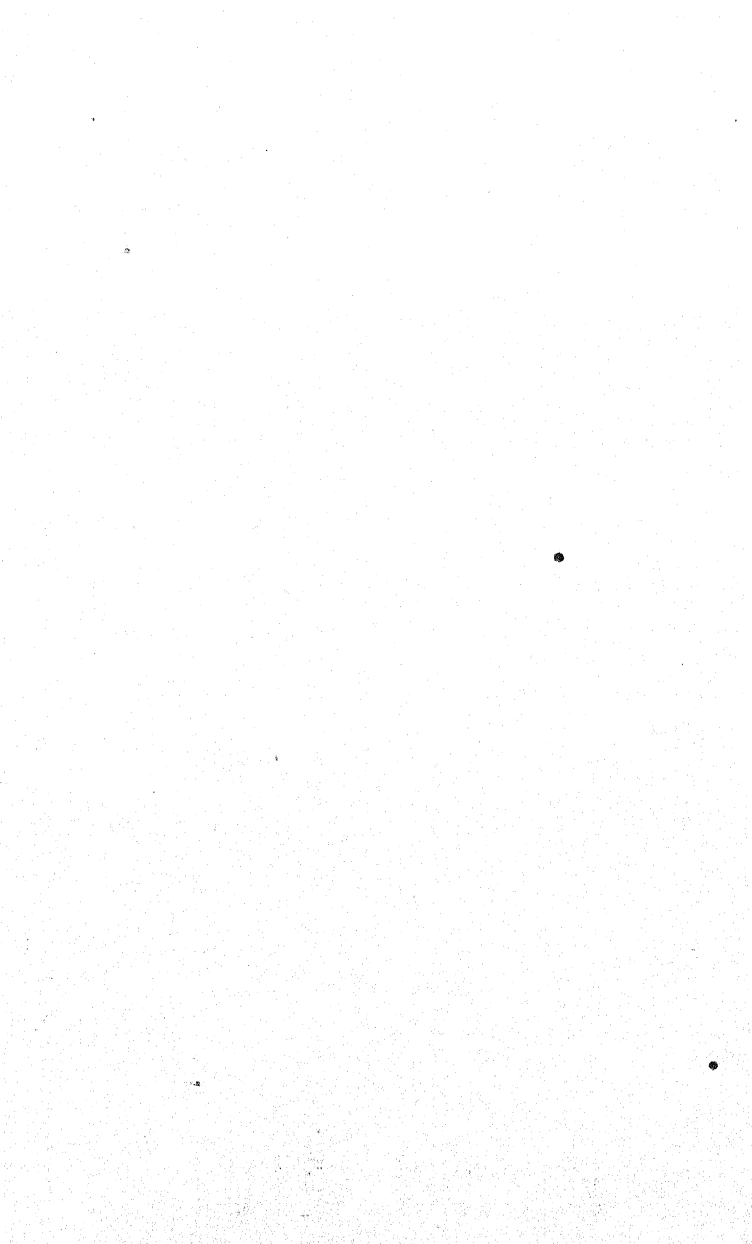
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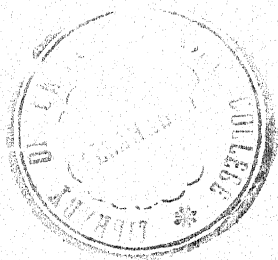


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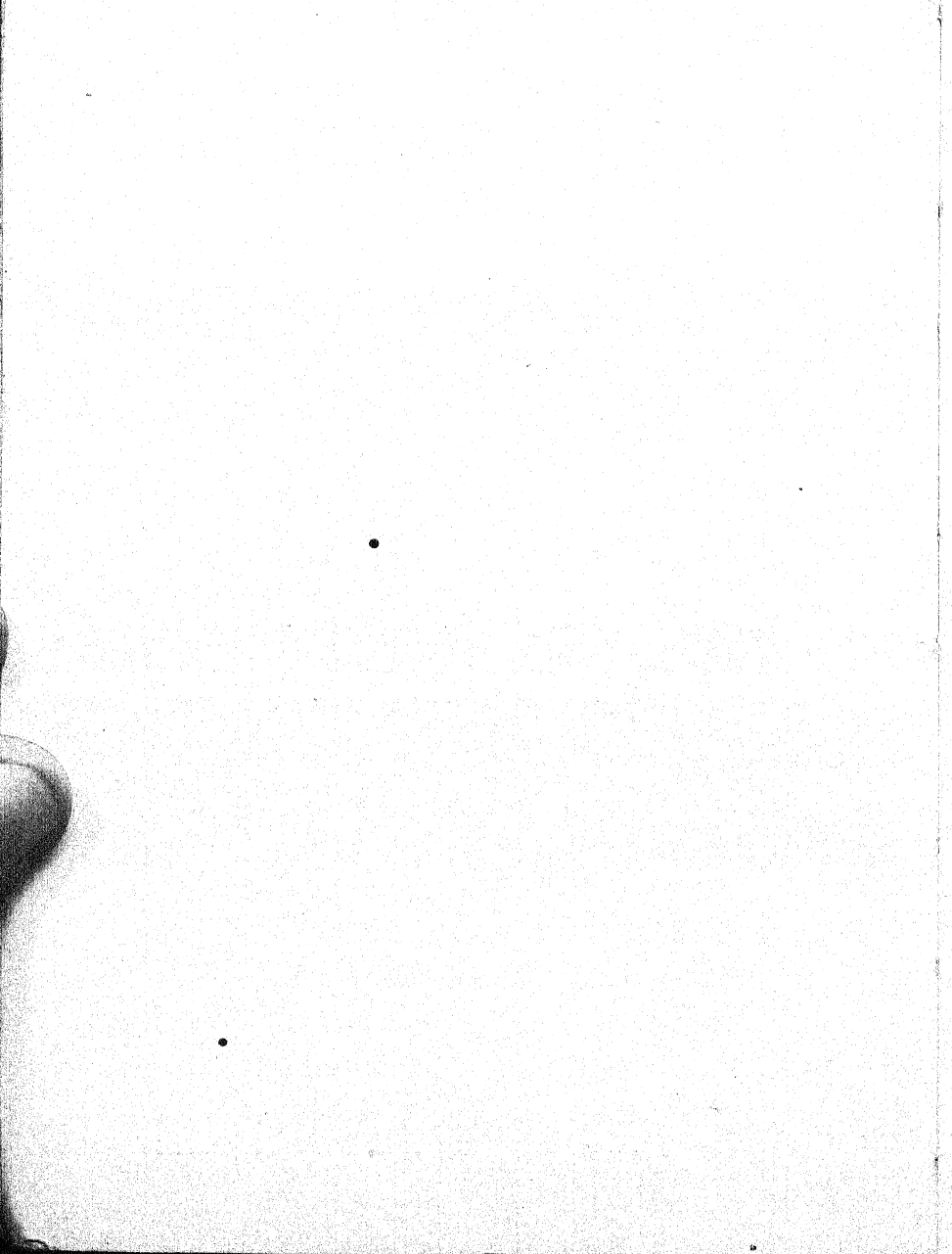
THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG

BY
P. GRANVILLE EDGE

WITH FOUR COLOUR PLATES BY
CHARLES FOLKARD



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CONTENTS

THE RHINE-GOLD :

	PAGE
THE THEFT OF THE TREASURE	7
THE BUILDING OF VALHALLA	11
THE LAND OF THE NIBELUNG	18
THE EVIL OF THE TREASURE	23

THE VALKYRIE :

THE WAR-MAIDENS	27
SIEGMUND AND SIEGLINDE	31
THE FIGHT	36
THE PENALTY OF DISOBEDIENCE	40

SIEGFRIED :

THE COMING OF SIEGFRIED	44
THE SLAYING OF THE DRAGON	53
THE FINDING OF BRÜNNHILDE	60

THE DOOM OF THE GODS :

THE THREE NORNS	66
THE DEPARTURE OF SIEGFRIED	67
THE COMPACT WITH GUNTHER	71
THE VISIT OF VALTRAUTA	78
THE MEETING OF SIEGFRIED AND BRÜNNHILDE	81
THE DEATH OF SIEGFRIED	87
THE RETURN OF THE RING	92

LIST OF COLOUR PLATES

"A COMPANY OF WAR-LIKE MAIDENS".	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
"SIEGFRIED SET TO WORK TO MAKE THE SWORD HIMSELF"	50
"HE PERCEIVED THE FEATURES OF A BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN"	64
"GUNTHER, LEADING BRÜNNHILDE, LANDED, AND ADVANCED TOWARDS SIEGFRIED"	82

THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG

THE RHINE-GOLD

The Theft of the Treasure

THOUSANDS and thousands of years ago, in the beginning of things, this world of ours was inhabited by many strange beings which now we never see. Above the mountain peaks, among the clouds and mists, dwelt gods and goddesses; in the plains and valleys lived savage giants and hideous monsters; in the caves underground were to be found a race of horribly deformed dwarfs known as Nibelungs, while the seas, lakes, and rivers were peopled by beauteous water-nymphs.

At the time of which we are speaking, there dwelt in the dim, cool depths of the River Rhine, three strangely beautiful sisters. To look upon, they were to all appearances like other beautiful maidens, the only difference being that they spent their whole time and all their days under the water, unseen by mortal eyes. They were known as the Rhine-Maidens, and it was their duty to guard a Magic Treasure which lay hidden among the rocks

and waving water-plants growing in the river's bed.

This Magic Treasure consisted of a huge solid lump of the purest gold, of far greater value and more dazzling brilliancy than any ever seen before. But the most wonderful quality it possessed was this, that whosoever should own it and should contrive to weld a ring from its precious metal, would be in a position to become the master of the world; he would become all-powerful, and to him all things would be possible. The treasure was known as the Rhine-Gold, and the Rhine-Maidens guarded it most jealously, for they had been warned by their father that an enemy might endeavour to steal it from them.

One brilliantly sunny morning, when the three sisters were unusually joyous, swimming happily to and fro among the caves and grottoes of their watery home, glancing from time to time at their precious Treasure to assure themselves that it was still in its wonted place—their attention was drawn to a being perched upon a rock and gazing at them.

It was Alberich, Chief of the Nibelung. He was a hideously misshapen dwarf, who had been attracted to the scene by the beauty of the maidens. His body was bent and twisted and gnarled like the trunk of some ancient tree; his hands were long and bony, and his fingers were armed with cruel-looking nails resembling the talons of birds of prey;

his face was ugly, cruel-looking, and repulsive, so that altogether his appearance was loathsome in the extreme.

At first sight of this hideous-looking person the three sisters swam to the rock on which the Rhine-Gold rested, for not unnaturally they were anxious for the safety of their Treasure, and they imagined that the presence of the ugly Alberich boded no good. But as they beheld his slow and ungainly movements as he crawled painfully about the rocks of the river-bed, their anxiety passed and gave way to a mood of merriment; they swam to and fro near him, teasing him and making fun of his clumsiness.

Still, Alberich was far from being annoyed at their mockery; rather did he feel elated that such fair creatures had noticed him at all, and when they invited him to join them in a game of hide-and-seek he most gladly agreed. But though he entered into the game in the highest spirits and with the most unbounded energy, he found it impossible to catch any of them; as he stumbled among the sharp rocks down on the river-bed, he discovered that the nymphs most gracefully eluded him whenever he got near to them, and soon their mockery and derisive laughter drove him to such fury that he refused to play with them longer.

At that moment a passing ray of sunlight struck through the water and rested upon the summit of rock whereon lay the Rhine-Gold, and immediately

the dim river-bed was illumined by glancing rays of intense brilliancy which the Gold reflected.

When Alberich saw the Treasure, his tiny covetous eyes swelled with greedy anticipation. He was, however, cunning enough to hide his surprise, for he was anxious to learn something of the gold he had seen. Calling to the maidens, he asked them the meaning of the wonderful treasures which had been revealed.

Thoughtlessness of their father's warning, and contempt for their awkward and ungainly visitor, led the maidens in an unwise moment to speak of their charge. Alberich sat listening, entranced by the stories of the wonderful magic powers of the Gold, and mentally resolving that he would spare no efforts to secure possession of it.

"If," said Alberich, "the Gold is so precious a Treasure, why does not someone seize it and make use of it?"

"Because no one has been found who cares to pay the price which is demanded in exchange," replied one sister, as she swam gracefully past.

"And the price?" asked the dwarf.

"Is this," answered the nymph. "That whosoever would become the possessor of the magic Rhine-Gold must forswear Love and all its pleasures."

"What a silly story!" mocked Alberich, as he stealthily made his way nearer and nearer the Treasure. "As though a little matter such as

renouncing Love should give one such boundless might and power ! ”

“ You may mock and gibe,” answered the maidens, “ but you—even you, poor and ugly as you are—dare not forswear it. Love is the mightiest power in the world ; nothing great can be done without its aid ! ”

“ Dare I not ? ” exclaimed the dwarf. “ Love means nothing to me. Living as I do in the underworld, I have no use for it. I forswear it for ever, and call upon you Rhine-Maidens to be witnesses of my vow ! ”

As he said these words he sprang nimbly upwards over the rocks, and before the nymphs could prevent him, he had seized the Magic Treasure in his grasping clasp, and had disappeared through a cleft in the rock to his underground abode. With cries of dismay the Rhine-Maidens made as if to follow him, but they could not find him ; the last thing they heard was his mocking laugh deriding the power of Love.

Although Alberich was apparently successful in carrying off the Treasure, you will read of the terrible consequences which followed his crime. An evil spell followed the Gold, and as soon as Alberich had departed, its influences began to work and to make themselves felt.

The Building of Valhalla

FAR away upon the loftiest mountain heights lived Wotan, the mightiest of the gods, and with him

lived Fricka, his wife. The story goes that Wotan, who at this time possessed only one eye, had sacrificed the other in order that he might drink from the Spring of Knowledge, thereby acquiring great worldly power and wisdom. Growing over this spring was an ash tree, from which the god tore away a branch to serve as the haft of his Spear of Authority; on this spear were carved certain conditions and rules which Wotan had sworn to observe, and which set forth in detail the limits to the power he possessed.

Now it had been Wotan's great ambition to own a palace of unparalleled magnificence, and of such enormous size as would comfortably house the whole of the numerous members of his court; but though he had spared no pains in his efforts to discover competent builders, he had so far failed to find men who were capable of carrying out his plans.

One day he received a visit from two giants of extraordinary size. They were shown into his presence, and upon being asked their business, the spokesman of the pair answered that they had come to offer their services to Wotan as builders of the palace he desired.

"What are your names?" asked Wotan as he gazed upon them out of his single eye.

"My name is Fafner, the Frost-Giant," answered the spokesman; "and this other is my brother Fasolt. We are quite ready to build a palace for you if we can agree as to payment."

"And what is the price you propose asking in payment for this task?" asked Wotan.

"When we have completed our work," said Fafner, "you must give me the hand of your sister Freia in marriage."

Now, though Wotan was most anxious to have the palace built, yet he did not like the idea of handing over to the giants his beautiful and favourite sister. She it was who tended the Golden Apples, upon which the gods daily renewed their strength; without the aid of this magic fruit the eternal youth and power of the gods would gradually pass from them. Fafner knew this, and he desired Freia, not for herself, but for the Golden Apples of which she had charge.

While Wotan was pondering over the question of payment, his brother Loki, the Fire-God, and the most cunning of all the gods, whispered in his ear, saying:

"Let them build the palace; we can afterwards find an excuse for not paying the price they demand."

So Wotan turned to the giants, and telling them that he had decided to accede to their demands, commanded that they set to work immediately and have the palace built by sunrise the next day.

After making their obeisance to Wotan, the giants turned and went their way. Soon the sound of mighty blows and the thunderous crashes of falling rocks told that they were hard at work on

the mighty structure they had contracted to build. All that day and throughout the night this noise continued, and when dawn broke the following morning, the rising sun shone upon the Castle of Valhalla, revealing the new home of the gods in all its magnificent beauty and unparalleled splendour.

All the gods and goddesses were enraptured at sight of the beautiful building, and Wotan was eagerly anxious to take up his abode in it without further delay.

But just as he was about to do so, the two giant builders appeared on the scene and reminded Wotan of the bargain they had made. They demanded that the Goddess Freia be handed over to them as had been promised, failing which, Valhalla could not be used for the purpose for which it had been built.

Wotan refused to do this, and he asked the giants to be content with some other reward for their services; but this they declined to do. Placing themselves one upon each side of Freia, they called upon Wotan to carry out his promise, or, if he failed them, the palace should be demolished.

Seeing the lovely Freia between the two giants, Thor, the God of Thunder, rushed up, and threatened to crush the life out of both of them with his mighty hammer; but Wotan intervened, and, stretching out his Spear of Authority, said, "The word of Wotan cannot be broken; if the giants will not consent to accept some other reward, then I

shall be compelled to allow them to take my sister with them to their frost-regions."

At Wotan's words the gods and goddesses who stood about were filled with the direst dismay, for they wondered how they would be able to live without the lovely Goddess Freia; without the Golden Apples of Eternal Youth, old age would soon begin to lay his hand upon them, and their power and beauty would rapidly wane.

All this time the crafty Loki was nowhere to be found, and finally Wotan asked the giant to grant him one hour, so that search might be made for the God of Fire, with whom he wished to confer.

"We will grant you one hour only," replied the two giants.

Wotan at once commanded that messengers should be sent far and wide to summon Loki to his presence, but hardly had his command been given when the God of Fire himself appeared, and proceeded to admire the beautiful Castle of Valhalla which proudly stood upon the mountain heights.

Wotan at once reminded Loki that he had promised to find a substitute in place of Freia. But Loki replied that though he had wandered far and wide in the quest, he had searched in vain for a ransom for the lovely goddess, adding :

"I should imagine that the Frost-Giants would much rather have Freia than any other treasure that could be offered them."

Hearing these words, Thor, the Thunder-God,

and Froh, the God of Beauty, rushed upon Loki to kill him, but Wotan again restrained them. He knew that Loki was cunning to the extreme, and he felt sure that, in spite of his apparently careless speech, the Fire-God had contrived some plan for the release of the Goddess of Youth.

"I doubt whether the famous Rhine-Gold would serve as a ransom to free the Goddess Freia," continued Loki, as unconcernedly as though no interruption, such as threats of death, had occurred. "And that reminds me, that I have just heard a remarkable story touching the Rhine-Gold.

"As I was passing along the banks of the Rhine there suddenly fell upon my ears the sound of distressing grief. Looking about me to see whence the sound came, I beheld the three Rhine-Maidens; yet I scarcely recognised them in their grief. Instead of three care-free and pleasure-loving nymphs, I beheld three maidens whose faces were marred and disfigured by tears and expressions of the deepest dismay. While they continued to tear their hair and beat their breasts, they cried in despairing accents, 'The Rhine-Gold is stolen! The Rhine-Gold is stolen!'

"I stayed and questioned them. They told me that Alberich, the Chief of the Nibelung, had captured the Magic Treasure and had conveyed it to Nibelheim, his underground abode. I understand that he proposes by its help to rule the whole world."

All this was said in tones loud enough for the

giants Fafner and Fasolt to hear, and when Loki had come to the end of his story the giants turned towards Wotan, saying :

“Wotan, Mightiest of Gods, if you will recover this Treasure from the Nibelung and hand it to us, we will return Freia to you.”

But Wotan hesitated ; he knew that the Gold would bring endless trouble to any who might retain it. Even the gods themselves were not immune from the torment arising out of its theft ; the Rhine-Maidens were its guardians, and whoever recovered it should return it to their charge.

Seeing that Wotan could arrive at no decision, the two Frost-Giants seized hold of Fæia, saying :

“We have done our part, and until you agree to give us the Rhine-Gold in her place, this goddess must accompany us to the Frost-Land. We will return at nightfall to see whether you have thought better of our offer.”

Then, heeding not her mournful cries, they hurried away down the mountain side, bearing the beautiful goddess with them.

Almost immediately a change came over the gods and goddesses who stood around Wotan. With the departure of Freia the Goddess of Youth, Beauty, and Immortality, old age had at once begun to lay his icy hand upon them.

The Fire-God and Fricka, the wife of Wotan, urged Wotan to immediate action ere the blight of old age should affect them all, and, with the fire

of grim determination and resolution in his one eye, Wotan suddenly sprang up, calling to Loki :

“Follow me. We will invade the land of the Nibelung and seize upon the Rhine-Gold !”

“And if we are successful in obtaining the Treasure, shall it be returned to the care of the Rhine-Maidens ?” asked the crafty Loki.

“Freia must be ransomed,” answered Wotan, “or we shall all come to an untimely end. Lead the way to Nibelheim.”

The Land of the Nibelung

THE gods set out, and shortly came to a cleft in the rocks which served as a chimney for the forge-fires of the Nibelung. Down, down, down this cleft they crept, through curling clouds of stifling smoke, right into the depths of the Under-World. As they got nearer to the home of the Nibelung they could hear the roaring of the forge-fires and the deafening sounds of countless hammers, and as these noises reached them they hurried at a greater pace.

At last they found themselves in an enormous cave, looking upon a strangely weird sight. Hundreds of fearsome dwarfs hurried to and fro ; some were working feverishly at the forge-fires ; others were bearing in their arms huge loads of precious metals ; while others were hammering at masses of gold and silver.

Just as Wotan and Loki reached their strange

cavern, they heard the sound of voices raised in quarrelling, and looking towards the place whence came the sounds of strife, they beheld Alberich dragging along Mime, his own brother, by the ear.

Since seizing the Rhine-Gold, Alberich had welded the stolen Gold into the Magic Ring of Power, and by its aid had compelled all the other dwarfs to work and amass wealth for him. He had commanded Mime to forge the Tarnhelm, or Invisible Cap, and it was because Mime had endeavoured to hide this object that Alberich was punishing his brother; for the Invisible Cap enabled the wearer to become invisible, to change his shape, and to travel great distances with the speed of a flash of lightning.

Seizing the Magic Cap, Alberich turned to the dwarfs assembled in the cave, and addressing them, said :

“Listen, and mark well my words ! I am your king, and from henceforth your work is to amass and pile up wealth for my use. You are my slaves, and though you may not always see me, I possess magic power, so that I may always be able to make my presence felt.”

At the conclusion of this speech he placed the Helmet upon his head, and immediately became invisible. From the spot whereon he had stood arose a mist, and from out this mist his voice could be heard, and also the sound of cruel blows which fell across the back of Mime.

Hearing these sounds the other dwarfs hurried to the recesses of the cave ; soon Mime collapsed under the pitiless lashes he received, and fell groaning to the ground. The reign of Alberich had commenced.

Hearing Mime's cries of distress, Wotan and Loki hurried to his side and assured him that they would do all they could to help him, while at the same moment Alberich reappeared in his true shape, having the Ring of Power on his finger, and carrying his Magic Helmet in his hand and driving a crowd of Nibelungs, each bearing a load of treasure, before him. Alberich held out the Ring towards Mime and the other dwarfs, and they disappeared with howls and cries under the influence of its magic.

Seeing the two celestial gods, Alberich's repulsive face grew dark with passion as he turned to them, saying :

"What is the reason for your presence here ? Do you not know that I am King of the Nibelung, and that I fear neither gods nor men ?"

"Having heard of the marvels of this underground world, we have come to see for ourselves those things of which we have heard so much," replied Wotan quietly.

"Well," retorted Alberich, "look around, and you will gain some small idea of the wealth I possess. But more valuable than all is this Ring which I have made from the Rhine-Gold. By its aid I shall be enabled to conquer the world—overcome the gods themselves."

But in spite of all his vain boasts, he was no match for the cunning God of Fire, who, turning to gaze admiringly upon the Ring, exclaimed :

"What a magnificent Ring! If it is really welded from the famous Rhine-Gold, it should give you possession of everything in the world, should it not?"

"I made it myself from the Rhine-Gold," proudly asserted Alberich, "and it gives me power over everything but Love."

"But I am told that Love is the greatest of all Powers," innocently remarked Loki.

"Rubbish!" retorted the ugly dwarf. "Anyhow, for my part, give me the Ring of Power."

"If the Ring is so valuable," continued Loki, "are you not afraid that you might lose it, or that it might be stolen from your finger while you sleep?"

"That would be impossible," proudly answered Alberich, "for by means of this Magic Helmet, which has also been made from the Rhine-Gold, I shall be able to snap my fingers at the craftiest of robbers; the Helmet gives me power to change my shape to whatsoever I choose."

"Come, come!" mockingly persisted Loki. "You surely don't expect us to believe *that* story! For my part, I should have to see such a thing to be convinced that it were possible."

Alberich fell a willing victim to the clever flattery of the crafty God of Fire, and, placing the Helmet upon his head, and muttering a few strange words,

he instantly disappeared and in his place was to be seen a snake of monstrous size. After wriggling about the ground for a short time it suddenly disappeared, and the dwarf once more confronted them.

"Well, do you believe in my power now?" mockingly asked Alberich.

But this performance of magic did not suit the plans of the wily Loki. Turning to Alberich he exclaimed:

"Wonderful—wonderful! Had I not seen it I should not have believed that such things were possible. And can you change into small creatures as you seem to be able to do into large ones—or do you find it any more difficult?"

"Nothing is difficult to me," replied the dwarf, unsuspectingly. "Look at me now!"

And in the twinkling of an eye he had altered his shape to that of a toad.

"Tread upon him quickly!" exclaimed Loki, and Wotan instantly put his foot upon it. As he did so the toad changed and was gone, and Alberich was seen struggling to free himself from beneath the weight of Wotan's foot.

Removing the Magic Helmet from his head, and binding him securely, Wotan and Loki hurried off with the ugly dwarf to the Upper-World, which was still enveloped in gloomy mists, as though mourning for the loss of the Goddess Freia.

Wotan and Loki promised Alberich that if he

handed over to them all the Rhine-Gold, the Magic Helmet, and the Ring, they would set him free.

The dwarf summoned his Nibelungs by means of the Ring, and commanded them to bring up from the Under-World all the treasure that was hidden there, and to the pile he added the Magic Helmet. He furiously refused to part with the Ring; all arguments were in vain, and at last Wotan wrested it from him by force, and placed it on his own finger. Then the dwarf was released.

Rising from the ground in a terrible rage at the treatment he had received, Alberich cried in impassioned tones :

“My spell rests upon the Ring. Whosoever shall own it shall suffer. Its Gold gave me boundless might and power; may it now bring its owner Sorrow and Death !”

The Evil of the Treasure

IN spite of Alberich's dreadful words, the gods wasted no time, but hurried off with the Magic Treasure, for they were anxious to liberate their sister. On their way they met the two giants Fafner and Fasolt, bearing the goddess to their icy home. Telling them that they had been successful in obtaining the Rhine-Gold, the gods commanded the giants to bear her no farther, but to set her down and release her.

They did as they were commanded, demanding,

as her ransom, as much of the treasure as would completely hide the goddess. This was agreed to, and two staves were placed upright in the ground in front of Freia, and the gold was heaped before her.

In the meantime, many of the other gods had assembled, full of joy at the thought that they should soon have their favourite with them again; the mists began to roll away, and the gloom began to lighten, though the Castle of Valhalla was still invisible.

When the Treasure was all used up and the Magic Helmet added to the heap, the pile reached the height of Freia's head. But there was a tiny chink in the pile of gold through which the eyes of the goddess could be seen. Fafner demanded the Ring to place in the chink to complete the bargain.

At this there was a great uproar, for Wotan had not intended to part with the Ring. Voices were raised in anger, the mists began once more to shut out the light from the land; it appeared as if Freia would have to be forfeited, for Wotan seemed reluctant to part with the Ring.

In the midst of all this tumult a most mysterious incident arose. The rocks parted, and from between them there issued forth a woman of beautiful appearance, clad in a flowing form made from leaves and growing plants. This was Erda, the Earth-Mother, who, stretching forth her hands to Wotan, urged

him to give up the Ring to the giants, and so avert the trouble which would follow its possession.

After hearing Erda speak, Wotan realised that what she said was right, and turning to the Frost-Giants, handed them the Ring, saying :

"Here, take the Ring, and leave our sister. Remember that the Treasure carries with it a spell."

Immediately the giants took the Treasure, the dreadful spell which Alberich laid upon it began to work. As they turned to gather up the Gold and to divide it among themselves, they quarrelled over the division. Fasolt charged Fafner with dishonesty ; from hot words they came to blows, and Fafner smote Fasolt so heavily as to kill him. •

Fafner gathered together all the Treasure, and taking no notice of the dead body of his brother, made off while the gods stood by, mute with amazement at this sudden evidence of the trouble which followed the Treasure.

To Wotan, too, came gloomy thoughts at that moment, for he began to realise the awfulness of the crime in not returning the Gold to the Rhine-Maidens.

In the midst of all the trouble arising out of these happenings, Thor, the God of Thunder, struck the rocks a mighty blow with his hammer, and called upon the Powers of the Storm to clear the air of the mists which still hung round the mountain tops.

The clouds rolled away at his command, and exposed to view the Castle of Valhalla in all its

radiant beauty ; and stretching across the valley of the Rhine, leading right to the gates of the Castle, was an exquisitely beautiful Rainbow Bridge.

Taking his wife Fricka by the hand, and calling upon the other gods to follow him, Wotan led the way, and in stately procession the gods and goddesses filed across the Rainbow Bridge and entered the gorgeous palace that had been built for them.

As they trod that radiant path, with the air ringing from their happy jests and laughter, and the breeze sweet-scented from the fragrance of countless growing things, the evening sun shone down upon as delightful a scene as could be imagined ; but in spite of all, Wotan was not happy. As he led the way, followed by the others, the plaints of the Rhine-Maidens mourning for their lost Treasure were wafted to him on the evening breezes.

THE VALKYRIE

The War-Maidens

IN the previous chapter we left the gods and goddesses crossing the Rainbow Bridge to their new home, the Castle of Valhalla. Soon they were all assembled inside its walls, and though they had been prepared to look upon a home of great magnificence, words failed them to express their joyous admiration of all the matchless splendour which met their gaze on every hand.

Gorgeously decorated ceilings, so high above the ground as to appear to form a part of the sky itself, rested upon pillars of rich stone most exquisitely sculptured ; handsome rooms of enormous size opened out from halls and galleries of dazzling beauty ; huge gardens, in which the rarest of flowers and fruits grew in lavish profusion, stretched away on every side. In it there stood that strangely wonderful tree whereon grew the Golden Apples from which the Goddess Freia daily fed the gods that they might renew their strength and become immortal ; and here and there cool fountains played and plashed, their dustlike spray catching a thousand brilliant sparks of colour from the dazzling rays of the sun.

Such was the new home of the gods, and it seemed that at last all were to be supremely happy, surrounded as they were on all sides by such magnificence.

But there was one whose heart was heavy with grief, and who, as day succeeded day, grew more depressed through the gloominess of his own thoughts. In spite of the fact that he had at last a home more beautiful than his highest hopes had even dared to wish for, the thought that all these things had been possible only through the forfeit of the Rhine-Gold made Wotan sadly apprehensive for the future; he felt sure that unless the Gold was returned to the Rhine-Maidens, the evil which overshadowed it and followed its possession would bring trouble in its train.

And so, while the air rang with the laughter and merry-making of the gods and goddesses, Wotan avoided his companions and sat alone, nursing his secret grief.

So time rolled on, until at last, unable to bear the strain of anxiety any longer, Wotan made up his mind to seek Erda, the Earth-Mother, to ask her to advise him as to the best course to pursue, for he knew that unless it were found possible to return the Gold to the rightful guardians even the gods themselves stood in peril. Having made all preparations for his journey, one morning Wotan, armed with his Spear of Authority, set out from Valhalla to discover a plan that should lead to the

removal of the dreadful spell which threatened the destruction of himself and the other gods.

Years passed by, and still Wotan did not return to his splendid home of Valhalla. At last he had been absent for such an age, that the other gods thought that some harm had befallen him; no longer did the spirit of careless happiness pervade the palace; instead, there settled a heavy pall of sadness and mourning at the continued absence of the mighty Wotan.

But one summer's dawn the occupants of Valhalla were aroused from their sleep by the sound of voices singing martial airs, and at last the watchers beheld, soaring towards them from among the clouds, a company of warlike maidens, and in the midst of this strange company they discovered Wotan. There were nine of these maidens, each one mounted upon a powerful winged horse, and they passed through the air with the speed of a flash of light.

At the sight of their great god, the other gods and goddesses eagerly pushed forth to greet him; they noticed that Wotan had lost his air of depression, and they crowded round him to hear his words.

Leading forth the nine maidens who accompanied him, Wotan turned to his court, saying:

"These fair warriors are the nine Valkyries or War-Maidens, who have returned with me that they might protect us from our enemies. They are Choosers of the Slain, and it will be part of their duty to ride about the world and convey to

Valhalla the souls of the slain heroes who have fallen in battle; these heroes will form our bodyguard, and by their help we need fear no perils for the future."

The nine War-Maidens were greeted with shouts of welcome by all those assembled in the halls of Valhalla; then they were given the Golden Apples to eat that they might become immortal.

Each day the Valkyries set forth from the Castle in search of the brave men who had fallen in fiercest battle, and as they discovered those who had distinguished themselves by conspicuous bravery they conveyed them to Valhalla, where they became immortal. Soon Wotan had a mighty army of tried heroes around him, and he felt secure in the presence of such a noble band. His soldiers practised feats of arms daily, striking each other fierce blows, for you must know that if by any chance one of them was wounded, by magic this hurt became immediately well again, and he suffered neither pain nor injury.

Day succeeded day, and although Wotan felt more secure now that he had the Valkyries and the heroes, he knew that the trouble which the stolen Gold carried with it was a source of menace to himself and to the other gods. Once he had recovered the Treasure and returned it to the Rhine-Daughters, his peril would pass, so he turned his attention to devising a plan that should lead to the recovery of the stolen Hoard.

Now after slaying his brother in the quarrel, Fafner had conveyed his spoil to the middle of a dense forest, and there had hidden it in a cave; he had then, by means of the Magic Helmet, changed his form into that of a dragon of fearful aspect, and lay across the cave mouth, guarding the Gold he had secured at the cost of his brother's life.

Wotan knew exactly where the Treasure was hidden, but neither he himself nor any of the gods could touch it, for, if you remember, Wotan had given his word to Fafner that he could keep the Treasure in place of Freia. The only thing to do was to find some brave warrior who would attack and slay the dragon.

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Siegmund and Sieglinde

WOTAN searched the world up and down for a man capable and brave enough to carry out his daring plan, and for a long time he was unsuccessful. Finally he decided to send one of his own earth-born children, choosing for the purpose a young boy, Siegmund by name. This youth was trained under the care of Wotan to live a simple, healthy, outdoor life, and each day saw him performing all kinds of warlike exercises, so that he might one day be fitly prepared to meet the fearful monster.

But Siegmund's youthful days were clouded by many a sorrow. On one occasion during his absence, his home was attacked by a fierce warrior named

Hunding; the building was reduced to ruins, his mother was slain, and his twin sister, Sieglinde, was kidnapped and married by force to the cruel Hunding. When Siegmund returned and saw the ashes of his home he was at first prostrate with grief, but soon his anger for the outrage roused him to action, and he vowed that he would seek out the whole tribe of Hunding and rest not until they one and all were put to the sword.

Another great trial came to him later on. His father, Wotan, who had been his constant companion, adviser, and instructor, suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, telling not whence nor where he had gone; the only message he left was one which said that when his son Siegmund stood in the greatest peril of his life he would find near at hand a sword which would not fail to succour him. These two great sorrows were a sore trial to Siegmund, who became a wanderer up and down the earth.

One day, after a long and exhausting journey, he saw through the trees a forest-dwelling built round the trunk of a tree, and as he was thoroughly tired out he went up to the door to ask that he might be allowed to rest there for the night. As he could make no one hear, he went into a room, and, weary and footsore from the fatigue of long travelling, fell asleep in front of the fire.

He had not been asleep many minutes when a maiden entered the room. This maid was none other than his twin sister Sieglinde, for by a strange freak

of fortune her brother had taken shelter unwittingly in the house of the very man he had vowed to slay. Sieglinde set to work at once to wash and dress the wounds of the unfortunate wanderer, for of course she did not know that this poor distressed being was her own brother, neither did Siegmund recognise his sister, for each had believed the other to be dead.

While Sieglinde was busily employed at her merciful task, Hunding returned. Seeing a wearied stranger on the hearth, Hunding gave him a few words of welcome and bade him rest for the night with them, an invitation which Siegmund was most glad to accept, for he had no idea that this rough hunter was his sworn enemy. During the course of their conversation, however, the hunter discovered Siegmund's identity, and immediately broke out in a torrent of abuse.

"You are the enemy," exclaimed he, "who has made an oath to destroy, root and branch, the tribe of Hunding! For to-night the sacred Guest-Rite protects you, and I am unable to harm you; but at sun-up to-morrow be prepared to meet me, and we will fight to the death!"

With these words Hunding turned on his heel and left Siegmund alone.

When Siegmund heard all this, he in his turn was full of surprise at the thought that Fate had led his steps to the dwelling of this rough hunter; but though still weak and weary from his wander-

ings, he accepted Hunding's challenge to fight. He could not help thinking with some bitterness that his life seemed to be a succession of griefs. From thoughts such as these his mind was carried back to the message his father Wotan had left, namely, that he should find a trusty sword at hand in the hour of his greatest need.

While he turned things over in his mind in this manner, the door of the room was softly opened, and there crept stealthily in the maiden who had attended to his hurts; she crossed the room quietly until she reached Siegmund's side.

"Hunding lies in a deep sleep," whispered she. "I mixed a drug with his drink, for he has a mind to kill you. Fly for your life!"

Siegmund refused to do as she suggested, and asked her what had prompted her to act so kindly towards himself, a stranger; and looking earnestly into her face, he remarked:

"And yet, not altogether a stranger, for I have a vague feeling that I have spoken with you before."

"I, too, seem to know you," replied Sieglinde. "But I will tell you the story of my life; it is quite possible that we *have* met before, for you must know that I have not always lived with Hunding's tribe."

Then she told him of how she came there.

"Since then," she said, "my life has been commonplace and uneventful, but for one strange incident which occurred at my wedding feast. On

that occasion, a strange one-eyed man, unknown to any of the guests assembled, entered the grounds, bearing in his right hand a large sword. Walking up to a tree, he smote it with his sword a mighty blow, driving the blade of his weapon right into the wood; then, turning towards us, he declared in a loud voice that there was but one man in the whole wide world who would be able to draw the weapon from the tree.

“Since then many famous warriors have journeyed to this spot and essayed to draw forth the sword, but up to the present no one has succeeded; it remains as the one-eyed stranger left it, and can only be drawn forth by the chosen hero as foretold by the stranger.”

When Siegmund heard this tale about the sword his heart swelled with joy and pride; he knew that this fair maiden was his long-lost sister Sieglinde, and that the sword was the one which Wotan had left for him. Brother and sister crept quietly outside until they came to the tree which held the sword, and, grasping the weapon firmly by the hilt, Siegmund drew it forth from the tree quite easily, and, turning to his sister, exclaimed:

“Behold, the sword was intended for me. The one-eyed stranger you speak of was my father Wotan, who promised me long ago that in the hour of my direst need I should find a trusty sword at hand. After all my wanderings I have found this wonderful weapon; but, better still, I have found my

twin sister Sieglinde. You are the sister who was carried off when our mother was slain, and our home sacked. Look at me, and try to remember me ! ”

Sieglinde looked doubtfully at her brother at first ; but gradually from the dim recesses of her mind, memory came to her aid, and she was able to recognise Siegmund. Their happiness was now almost complete ; all that remained was for them to fly together and leave the home of Hunding and its unpleasant associations far behind them. The sword would serve as a weapon of defence should they be attacked, so, stepping out bravely, brother and sister set forth to find a fresh home that should bring to them love, happiness, and liberty.

The Fight

BEING a god, Wotan, of course, knew of all the happenings and adventures that had befallen Siegmund ; he could foresee, also, that Hunding would track down Siegmund and compel him to fight.

So he summoned his favourite Valkyrie, Brünnhilde, to his side, and commanded her to follow the twins and protect them during the coming struggle. In order to arouse Brünnhilde's sympathy for the brother and sister, Wotan told her their story, and of all the strange happenings that had entered the lives of these unhappy children since their birth. Long before Wotan had reached the end of his tale,

Brünnhilde was anxious to be away to Siegmund's side, for Wotan had told her that she must see that his son was the victor in the fight. The tale ended, she set out at once on her mission, followed by the other War-Maidens, bent upon the destruction of Hunding and the rescue of the twins.

Now, Wotan had counted without his wife. Scarcely had Brünnhilde disappeared from the scene than Fricka appeared at her husband's side. She pointed out that the twins had broken the marriage-vow, for Sieglinde was the wife of Hunding; if Siegmund were allowed to carry off his sister and were not punished, men would say that the gods did not mete out justice.

Being opposed by his wife in this manner, Wotan argued that as Sieglinde had been compelled against her will to take the marriage-vow, she was freed from her oath, but Fricka would not agree.

"Justice must be meted out to Siegmund, and the hunter aided in his pursuit against the twins," said she. "Sieglinde must return to her former husband, and Siegmund must be slain in spite of the Magic Sword."

As Fricka delivered this opinion, Wotan's brow was overcast by tragic sorrow to think that he was to be compelled to sacrifice the life of his own son. Wotan knew that Fricka's arguments were unanswerable, and so, sadly and reluctantly, he again summoned Brünnhilde and informed her that she must withhold her protection and allow Siegmund

to fall in the fight. He sorrowfully told her that the coming tragedy was but another instance of the evil and unhappiness that had followed the theft of the Rhine-Gold. Brünnhilde listened to all this in great grief; but though outwardly agreeing to obey Wotan's commands, she privately decided to lend her aid to the twins.

Meanwhile, these two unhappy beings, exhausted by their flight from Hunding, stopped to rest in a forest, and while Sieglinde slept, Siegmund stood guard over his sister. Just then Brünnhilde came upon them in the forest! Calling softly to Siegmund, so that his sister should not be disturbed, the War-Maiden told him who she was.

"My heart is heavy with the news I bring you of the battle," said she.

"I have no fears," answered Siegmund, "for I possess a Magic Sword which will gain the day for me."

"The Sword will be useless," said Brünnhilde sadly, "for the gods have decided that you must die, and after death I am to convey you to Valhalla."

"And what is this Valhalla of which you speak?" asked Siegmund.

"It is the home of the gods and the resting-place for the souls of dead heroes," answered Brünnhilde; and she went on to tell him of all the glory and bliss of the home of dead heroes. But Siegmund decided that he cared nothing for all the glory of such a life unless his sister Sieglinde should accom-

pany him; and learning that this might not be, he requested the War-Maiden to convey his greetings to his father, Wotan, and to all the heroes of Valhalla, but to tell them that he would not be parted from his sister again.

Brünnhilde was so moved to compassion at the sight of the loving regard which the twins bore for each other that she resolved to disobey Wotan's command, and she promised Siegmund that she would help him to gain the victory.

So Siegmund stood forth to meet the warrior Hunding, who had by this time approached. The air grew dark with foreboding, as though the very heavens themselves were angered at the approaching conflict, and deafening peals of thunder were heard, and vivid and vicious flashes of lightning were seen.

The fight began, and Sieglinde, who had been awakened by the crashing noises of the storm, stood by, anxiously watching the combat with pallid face and fluttering heart; she could see Brünnhilde hovering over Siegmund, ready to protect him should she be required to do so. To and fro the fight was carried, until at last Siegmund saw his opportunity, and rushed in to deal his enemy a fatal thrust. At that moment a ruddy blaze of light broke through the clouds, the Magic Sword lay shattered on the ground, and Siegmund fell, mortally wounded by the weapon of Hunding; Wotan, by the promise he had made to Fricka, had been com-

pelled to interfere. But the fierce hunter did not long enjoy the glory of victory, for, turning to him, Wotan gazed upon him out of his single glittering eye, and at the dreadful glance of the mighty god Hunding fell dead.

The Penalty of Disobedience

BRÜNNHILDE now began to realise that she had committed a great wrong by disobeying Wotan's commands, and fearing that he might call down some dreadful punishment upon her, she took the half-unconscious Sieglinde in her arms, sprang in haste upon the back of her fiery winged steed, and rode furiously towards the rocky heights on which were assembled the other eight War-Maidens.

Hastily summoning her companions around her, she explained all that had happened, and asked her sisters to devise some plan which should save them, or at least Sieglinde, from the dreaded wrath of Wotan.

"Save Sieglinde!" cried Brünnhilde in her fear. "*She* is guilty of no wrong."

"I have no desire to live," mournfully sighed Sieglinde. "My dear Siegmund is no more, and I wish to die and be at rest with him. If you would do me a kindness, draw your sword and pierce my heart!"

"That cannot be," urged Brünnhilde. "You must seek safety in flight, for you are destined to

become the mother of the greatest hero the world shall ever see. Look! I have gathered together the pieces of Siegmund's broken Magic Sword, for your son shall one day perform doughty deeds by its aid when it has been pieced together."

Hearing this prophecy, Sieglinde took courage and agreed to act upon the counsel of the War-Maidens. By their aid she was conveyed under the darkness of a fearful storm to that dense forest where dwelt the dragon Fafner, the guardian of the Ring and Treasure; the War-Maidens knew that she would be safe in this wood, for Wotan never ventured to enter Fafner's territory.

Scarcely had the War-Maidens succeeded in conveying Sieglinde to the place of refuge they had found for her, when Wotan appeared in a blaze of blinding light, calling in a commanding voice :

"Brünnhilde !"

But Brünnhilde did not answer, nor did the other War-Maidens betray their presence through love for their sister.

Again the voice of Wotan was heard, and this time he commanded the Valkyrie to stand forth to hear him pronounce the punishment he had decided to inflict upon her for her disobedience. So Brünnhilde turned and knelt at the great god's feet to face his wrath, and to hear what penalty she was required to pay for disobeying his commands.

"Brünnhilde," thundered Wotan, "you have

failed to do as I commanded, and for the future you must cease to be a War-Maiden; you must from henceforth lose your godhood, and live upon the earth the life of an ordinary woman."

Hearing these words, Brünnhilde pleaded with the mighty god to set aside such a terrible punishment; she urged that Wotan himself had led her to take compassion on the twins, and she begged for mercy. But Wotan would not change his judgment.

"Best-loved of all the War-Maidens," exclaimed he, "I would that it could be as you wish, but it cannot. You must descend to earth in a deep sleep, and you must remain locked in sleep until the coming of a man who shall wake you; that man shall take you for a wife, and from henceforth you shall be his slave."

"If these things are to be," cried Brünnhilde, "then it may happen that the veriest craven of earth-born men might chance to waken me; if this happened, the gods themselves would be dishonoured in the act. If I am to fall asleep upon the rock as you say, then grant me such protection that none but the very bravest of men might break through my guard and claim me!"

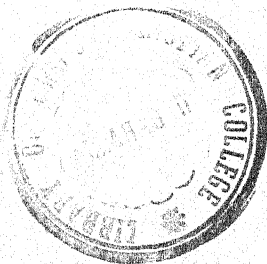
Wotan agreed to grant this boon to Brünnhilde.

"Fiery flames shall encompass you to scare the timid; no craven may win Brünnhilde!" he cried, and with these words he kissed the War-Maiden upon both her eyes, thus depriving her of her god-

hood, and at the same time causing her to fall into a deep sleep.

Taking her up in his arms he then carried her to the very summit of the rock and laid down her unconscious form, over which he placed helm and shield. Then he summoned to his side Loki, the God of Fire, and at a word a wall of fierce flickering flame arose and surrounded the rock to guard the sleeping Brünnhilde. And lastly, waving his Spear of Authority to and fro, Wotan, declaring "He that fears my spear's point shall not penetrate the flame," turned sadly and left his favourite War-Maiden in her lonely sleep, paying the penalty of her disobedience.

Thus closes another stage of this strange story of the troubles arising out of the theft of the Rhine-Gold.



SIEGFRIED

The Coming of Siegfried

FAR away in the shadowy depths of the forest lay the dragon Fafner, jealously guarding the coveted Treasure which had been obtained through the fearful crime of which you have already read. He never left the mouth of the cave, nor did he change his shape, but remained the same hideously ugly monster whose form he had assumed so long ago; for he was fearful lest by leaving the Rhine-Gold for a fraction of time, or by even changing his shape, he might be robbed.

The pigmy Nibelungs had not forgotten the existence of the precious hoard which had rested in their underground world for so short a time, and the thoughts of Alberich and Mime were always bent upon the discovery of a plan which might lead to its recovery.

In particular to Mime, life held nothing so dear as the desire to possess the Treasure. Knowing where the dragon lay in hiding, he set himself to watch Fafner, hoping that the day might come when he should slay the dragon, or by the exercise of cunning outwit the hideous guardian of the precious heap which he coveted so earnestly.

But the Nibelungs had always led an underground existence, and the very presence of light and sunshine was to them a source of fear. They were arrant cowards, and not the least cowardly of this misshapen race of beings was Mime, though what he lacked in bravery he more than made up for in sly and patient cunning.

Now, though Mime watched the dragon most anxiously, no opportunity of getting at the Treasure presented itself. It seemed as though the only plan which offered any chance of success was that Mime should creep up warily and attempt to kill the dragon; the very thought of the daring of such a method of attack as this was sufficient to cause the blood of the dwarf to freeze from fear. Another plan *must* be found that should not endanger the skin of Mime, and his days and nights were given up to plotting and thinking of how he might accomplish his purpose.

After considerable time spent in thought, he decided to build a forge in the forest, and devote his whole time to the making of swords and nothing else. He thought that constant practice in this one art, would, in course of time, render him such an excellent workman, that he would be able to forge a blade better than any that had ever been manufactured before. He decided that having made the blade, he would offer it to some brave warrior who might pass through the forest, and he would endeavour to persuade this hero to fight and kill

the dragon. So the forge was set up, and the dwarf commenced his work, and through the forest there echoed the pleasant ring of metal striking metal.

One day, whilst wandering in the forest, Mime came suddenly upon the prostrate form of a woman in whose arms lay a tiny child. At first his innate cowardice and cunning prompted him to retire from the spot, but realising that the poor woman was much too feeble to injure him he advanced cautiously.

As he approached, it was evident to him that the unfortunate woman was dying, and seeing her distressful state, even Mime felt compelled to lift her up and carry her near to the warmth of his forge. Having done this, he managed to revive her somewhat by pouring down her throat a potent medicine. In a short time, being somewhat rested and refreshed, she sat up on her rough couch, and, holding out her child towards the dwarf, whispered in an imploring voice :

"Take him and care for him. He is a descendant of a line of mighty heroes. His name is Siegfried, and it has been foretold that he shall become the greatest of heroes."

"How can you prove to me that your tale is true, and that this babe is to grow to be the hero you speak of ?" asked Mime, suspiciously.

"By this token can I prove it !" cried the dying mother ; and thrusting her hand into the folds of her gown she drew forth the broken pieces of the

famous Sword of Need, and held them before his eyes.

Before Mime had time for a further question, the poor worn-out creature had fallen back and breathed her last, and her soul had fled to join the spirit of her twin brother.

By this time Mime had recognised her as Sieglinde, the sister of Siegmund; he knew her story, and had heard some tales also of the coming of Siegfried.

He turned from the dead woman to the orphan babe she had left. The child was healthy and sturdily built, having firm, strong, well-shapen limbs, and an intelligent head in which were set two fearless blue eyes. In a moment Mime decided to take care of this child, and to rear him for his own selfish purposes.

“For,” said he to himself, “if he happens to grow up a fearless hero, perhaps he may be successful in slaying the dragon for me!”

The child grew apace, and in the open-air life developed into a radiantly handsome boy. All his time was spent in touch with wild, free Nature—roaming the forests, learning all he could of the ways and habits of the birds and beasts which inhabited it, and frequently returning with some animal or bird he had been successful in slaying.

So time rolled by, and each year Siegfried gained a greater fearlessness and a more perfectly developed body. All through these years, he had

been taught to look upon Mime as his father, but when he grew up and compared his own magnificent stature and perfect courage with that of the deformity and abject cowardice of the ugly misshapen dwarf, he soon came to the conclusion that no relationship could possibly exist between them. Only one thing kept Siegfried near the dwarf, and that was Mime's promise to forge a wonderful Sword, by the means of which Siegfried should succeed in winning every battle in which he should be engaged.

Day followed day, and still Mime was unsuccessful in forging the sword he had promised to make, and which Siegfried was so impatient and eager to possess. Many weapons were made, but Siegfried's mighty blows soon shattered them to atoms. At last the hero turned savagely on his foster-father and threatened to punish him if the promised sword were not soon forthcoming.

Frightened at hearing Siegfried's threat, the dwarf, in a whimpering tone, cried :

"Surely you would not injure your father, who has cared so tenderly for you since your birth !"

"You lie !" answered Siegfried angrily. "I have many times looked at myself in a clear still pool, and I am not in the least like you in looks. I have noticed in my walks through the forest that the young always bear the likeness of their parents, so that if you are my father, then I should bear some resemblance, however faint, to you. I do not believe you are my father—I am going to make you tell

me who my real parents were. Now speak, quickly and truthfully, or it will not go well with you."

Threatened in this manner, Mime unwillingly told Siegfried the story of how he had discovered his dying mother in the woods; he repeated Sieglinde's prophecy, and bringing forth the broken pieces of the Magic Sword, he placed them before the hero.

Taking the shattered sword in his hands, Siegfried recognised its worth at a glance, and turning to the dwarf, commanded him to set to work forthwith and piece it together without loss of time. Then he set out to wander through the forest, leaving Mime to his work.

But the dwarf was hopelessly incapable of welding these pieces into a useful blade, and he knew it; times out of number had he tried to accomplish the same task, but on all occasions he had failed.

Oppressed by his unhappy thoughts, and vainly trying to re-weld the broken Sword, Mime was much surprised at seeing, a short time after Siegfried had left him, a stranger enter the forge. This stranger was a huge giant, clad in hat and cloak, and carrying in his hand a great spear; the dwarf noticed that the stranger had but one eye.

In a moment he had recognised this person to be none other than Wotan, or the "Wanderer," as he had been called. Turning to the dwarf, Wotan began to question him about past events. Then he proposed a wager: that each was to ask the other

three questions, and he who should fail in answering correctly all three should forfeit his head to the winner. Mime agreed to this, but when Wotan had correctly answered his three questions Mime trembled with abject fear at the god's success, and made ready to discover correct answers to the Wanderer's question. The first two questions relating to the twins Siegmund and Sieglinde, and to the Magic Sword, Mime was able to answer correctly, but for the third question Wotan asked :

“ Who will forge the Sword that Siegfried is to wield ? ”

The dwarf was unable to supply the right answer. Still, Wotan did not claim his forfeit, and contenting himself with telling Mime that the only person capable of forging the Sword was he who knew no fear, he turned and disappeared in a blaze of light, leaving the ugly dwarf bewildered with fear.

Shortly after the departure of Wotan, Siegfried returned, and immediately asked Mime if he had succeeded in welding together the pieces of the sword. Then the dwarf told Siegfried of the visit of the terrible stranger, and that he had been utterly unable to work at his forge through fear.

“ Fear ! ” repeated Siegfried. “ I don't know what you mean. What is this fear of which you speak ? ”

“ Do you not know the meaning of fear ? ” questioned Mime, thinking at the same time of what Wotan had said to the effect that the hero who knew



"Siegfried set to work to make the sword himself" (see page 51)

no fear should be capable of forging the magic sword.

"No," replied Siegfried. "I don't know what you mean. Explain to me the meaning of the word."

Then the frightened dwarf drew upon his imagination and described the haunting lonesomeness of the depths of the forests; the terrors of fire; and the fearsome monsters and dragons which inhabited the earth, picturing all in the most terrifying manner of which he was capable. But to all of these things Siegfried only shook his head, expressing the wish that he might have one day the opportunity of fighting one of the dragons which Mime had described.

Hearing this, Mime described in all its hideous detail the dragon Fafner which dwelt in the Cave of Envy in that very forest.

"This dragon is such an alarming monster that even the gods themselves go in fear of it," concluded he.

"Such a beast would be worth fighting," remarked Siegfried, his eyes sparkling with the light of battle. "Make good the Magic Sword, and I will go forth and slay this beast of which you speak."

"But I cannot mend the blade," whimpered the dwarf; "only a fearless hero may succeed in welding all the broken pieces into one useful blade."

Hearing this, Siegfried pondered for a moment, and then furiously and impatiently set to work to make the Sword himself. First he took the pieces

of the blade, and by the aid of a file he rubbed the steel down into a fine powder. Seeing this, Mime screamed with angry disappointment :

“ You have ruined the Magic Sword ! Hopelessly ruined it ! ”

But his cries did not in the least disconcert Siegfried, who continued rubbing away until all the steel except the handle had been reduced to a fine powder. This he placed in the fire, and seizing the handle of the bellows, worked vigorously until he had a fierce blaze roaring beneath it ; soon the powder became a glowing molten mass. This boiling liquid metal he poured into a mould, and in a short time the hissing spluttering steel had cooled to a solid bar.

Seizing this newly-forged bar in a pair of pincers, he bore it to the fire again, and once more heated it. When it was sufficiently hot, he placed it on the anvil, and showered upon it repeated mighty blows until he was satisfied that the blade was sufficiently thin and tapered as it should be. After this, he once more plunged it into the fire, this time fastening the handle on to the blade, and so completing the weapon.

A close scrutiny of every part of the sword he had forged, convinced Siegfried that it was perfect in every detail ; the blade, exactly balanced to the hilt, was of the very finest temper. In an ecstasy of joy at his success he swung it round his head, to and fro in rapid circles, making the air

hum with the speed and force of his mighty exercises ; finally, he brought the blade down with terrific force upon the anvil at which he had worked, cleaving the solid metal through from top to bottom as though it had been an anvil made of cheese.

Springing to the door in triumph, and holding aloft the magic weapon, he cried :

“Behold the Sword of Need in which I have successfully renewed life and strength ! Farewell, Mime ! I leave you and go in search of this fearsome dragon of which you speak, and this home shall know me no more !”

Hurrying from the hut, and striding forth with rapid strides, Siegfried was soon lost to sight among the trees of the forest.

The Slaying of the Dragon

FOR a moment Mime stood dumbfounded ; the forging of the Sword, the cleaving of the anvil, and the sudden departure of Siegfried seemed to have temporarily deprived him of his senses. But hastily realising that unless he was able to collect his scattered wits and act promptly, the Rhine-Gold would never be his, he rushed after the hero, calling :

“Siegfried ! Siegfried ! Wait for me ! I have a message for you !”

Hearing the voice, Siegfried turned and waited until the dwarf had approached. Mime was breathless from his running and from anxiety lest Siegfried

should take no notice of him. When he had recovered his breath, he addressed the hero :

“Have you not realised the uselessness of setting out alone ?” he said. “Do you not know that unless I direct you, you will be unable to find the way to the dragon’s cave ?”

“Yes, I had thought of it,” said Siegfried with a smile, “but I imagined it useless to ask you to accompany me to act as my guide ; I thought fear would have held you back.”

“I *should* be afraid to attack the dragon,” admitted Mime, “but as *you* are going to do the fighting, and as I am only going to show you where this beast’s lair is, I do not think *I* stand in very great danger.”

Cunning Mime ! His plans were well laid, and it mattered not to the dwarf which way the fight turned—in any case, no harm could come to *him*. He had carefully prepared a poisonous brew, and it was his intention to offer this deadly draught to Siegfried as refreshment should he succeed in slaying the dragon. With Fafner and Siegfried out of the way, it seemed the easiest possible thing in the world to gain possession of the Magic Treasure.

But in spite of all his cunning, Mime had made one huge mistake in devising his plans for the recovery of the Gold—he had not considered that his equally cunning brother, Alberich, might also be bent upon the same quest. Even while Siegfried was still forging the magic blade, Alberich was engaged in watching outside the dragon’s cave, intent upon

once more having in his possession the Gold he had stolen from the Rhine-Maidens.

Upon the very day that Mime and Siegfried were fast approaching the Cave of Envy, Alberich had his watch disturbed by the appearance of a visitor, who was no other than Wotan the Wanderer. As soon as Alberich recognised Wotan, his suspicious nature imagined that the god had appeared for the purpose of gaining possession of the Ring, and, bursting into bitter reproaches and taunts, he swore that Wotan should never obtain the Treasure.

Wotan, however, disclaimed any intention of endeavouring to secure the Magic Gold; he told the dwarf that he had appeared to warn him that Siegfried and Mime were close at hand, and that Siegfried would slay the dragon, and so obtain possession of the Ring and the Hoard. Then, calling in a mighty voice, he awoke Fafner, and told him also of the approach of the hero. But the dragon paid no heed to the message, only requesting Wotan to leave him to rest in peace. The dwarf cunningly suggested to Fafner that as Siegfried only wished to secure the Ring, they should divide the spoil—Fafner retaining the Hoard, but handing over the Ring to Alberich. The wary dragon would not consider this proposal, however, and Wotan, having departed, Alberich withdrew to the shelter of some rocks close at hand, to remain in hiding and await the appearance of the hero and Mime.

Day was dawning as Siegfried and his companion

approached the dragon's cave, and while still some distance from the spot, the dwarf was able to point out to Siegfried exactly where the monster lay. Having discovered the Cave of Envy, Siegfried drove the dwarf away, and, left to himself, he lay down in the shade of a linden-tree, to rest his wearied limbs after his long journey so that he might feel thoroughly refreshed ere he ventured to attack the dragon.

As he lay upon the velvety turf, there came to his ear the drowsy murmur of the myriad voices of the forest; the gentle crisp brushing of the leaves stirred by the morning breeze; the creaking of branches; the soft crackling of undergrowth which told of the stealthy movements of some of the wood-folk; the hum of insects and the sweet, delightful music of the feathered choir overhead all impressed him deeply.

For some time he amused himself by endeavouring to imitate one of their songs upon a hastily-made reed whistle which he had devised. Unsuccessful in his efforts, however, and irritated by his failure, he sprang to his feet, and seizing the horn which he always carried, he blew upon it loud and long a brazen note of challenge which re-echoed through the length and breadth of the forest and awoke Fafner, who hurried from his lair, crashing heavily through the thickets in search of this disturber of his peace.

Siegfried heard the noise caused by the move-

ments of the dragon, and, peering through the bushes, he beheld the monster he had come out to slay. The dragon was a creature of stupendous size and alarming hideousness; in form it somewhat resembled a monstrous lizard; its hide was composed of hard, horny scales, its eyes were small and vicious-looking, and from a mouth armed with cruel-looking fangs and a forked tongue, there issued smoke and fire.

As it plunged through the undergrowth, it soon caught sight of Siegfried, and, making towards him, called in a grating voice :

"Who are you, and what do you near the Cave of Envy?"

The hero was rather surprised to hear this creature speak to him in this manner, but, nothing daunted, he answered coolly :

"I have been told by Mime the dwarf to come to you so that I may know the meaning of the word Fear."

"I will soon teach you the meaning of that word!" answered the dragon, assuming, if possible, a more hideous look, and spitting out fire and smoke as he spoke.

"Well," laughingly replied Siegfried, "you'd better hurry and do so. If you don't, then I am of the opinion that you will be the sufferer."

These cool remarks filled Fafner with rage, and lashing his dangerous tail about, and belching forth fire and smoke, he advanced rapidly upon Siegfried,

intending to put a speedy end to the hero's life. But Siegfried found it an easy matter to evade the ungainly rushes and attacks of the dragon, and, watching his opportunity, he was able to deal it a telling stroke or two with his sword. The wounds he inflicted only made the beast more angry than ever, and at last, rearing its body upon its hind legs, it prepared to hurl its weight upon its assailant. Siegfried, however, was ready, and quick as thought he rushed in and drove his weapon right up to the hilt into the breast of Fafner, inflicting a mortal wound.

Bellowing with pain and rage, and dangerously lashing its mighty tail to and fro, the dragon fell backwards, the sword still in its body, its life-blood rushing forth and staining the earth. Siegfried stood ready to rush in at the first opportunity to regain possession of his sword. Just before he breathed his last, Fafner asked the hero his name, and being informed, warned Siegfried of the Rhine-Gold and the dreadful spell which overshadowed it and followed all those who possessed it. Then, with a convulsive shudder, the dragon died.

Siegfried at once stepped forward and withdrew his sword, but as he did so some of the creature's blood dripped from the blade and fell upon his hand. These drops of the dragon's blood burned like fire, and carrying his hand to his mouth, he sucked the burning spots to cool and soothe them. Immediately upon doing this he became conscious

of a strange power which possessed him, and, what was a greater surprise, he found that he could now understand the language of the birds.

The bird he had made such efforts to imitate with the reed-pipe, now sang in the branches overhead, and the hero knew the meaning of its song, which told him where the Treasure was.

Hastily thanking the bird, Siegfried made his way into the Cave of Envy to search for the Treasure. Hardly had he gone before the two dwarfs, Alberich and Mime, appeared at the mouth of the cave, and commenced to quarrel violently as to which of them had the greater right to the spoil. In the middle of their quarrel, they heard the returning footsteps of Siegfried, and hurriedly they moved away so that the hero might not see them.

Siegfried soon reappeared at the mouth of the cave, bearing the Ring and the Helmet only, for he had disregarded the Treasure. As he appeared the same bird sang to Siegfried a warning of Mime's treachery, telling him not to trust the dwarf in anything.

Almost immediately Mime approached him, his face wreathed in smiles as though he were hugely pleased at the hero's victory; in his hands he bore a cup of mead.

"Well," asked Mime, with a cunning leer, "have you learned what fear is?"

"No," replied Siegfried; "I have not."

Then Mime advanced with the poisoned brew,

and inviting Siegfried to rest after his fight, he pressed him to drink from the cup he bore. But the blood of the dragon enabled Siegfried not only to understand the notes of birds, but also it gave him the power of forcing all men to speak the truth to him. So when Mime pressed him to drink, the hero knew the murderous impulse which had prompted the dwarf to act in this manner.

Seizing the cup in his hands, Siegfried dashed it to the ground, exclaiming: "The drink is poison; for since tasting the dragon's blood I am enabled to read your innermost thoughts!" And with these words he swung his Magic Sword around his head, and bringing it down with fearful force, struck the dwarf dead with one blow. Then, flinging into the cave the dead bodies of Mime and the Dragon, Siegfried prepared to set forth to perform greater deeds.

The Finding of Brünnhilde

YET, in spite of his victory over the dragon, and notwithstanding that he had been successful in obtaining the Ring and the Helmet of Darkness, Siegfried felt that his successes were of very little worth. He had neither friends nor kindred, and he longed for the companionship of his own kind; in this depressed and lonely mood he called upon the bird overhead to guide his footsteps to a good companion. The bird told him she could lead him to Brünnhilde, who lay asleep upon the summit of the lofty rock,

guarded by flames of living fire, awaiting the coming of the man who should not fear to penetrate the blaze to rescue her.

Upon hearing this story, Siegfried sprang to his feet overjoyed, and begged the bird to direct him to Brünnhilde. The bird agreed to lead him to the rock, and fluttering down from the tree, flew ahead, eagerly followed by the hero.

Over hill and dale he followed, through woods and forests, fording rushing mountain torrents, and ever ascending higher and higher, yet not once losing sight of his tiny winged guide. After a long and tiresome journey he at last found himself in a narrow valley, with wild precipitous sides, and there he lost sight of the bird. Looking round in the endeavour to catch sight of his feathered friend, he discovered a perilous pathway leading from the valley up to the summits of the lofty peaks which rose frowningly on every side, and he at once determined to follow this path in the hope that it would lead him to the goal he so eagerly desired to reach.

* * * * *

One fearfully wild and stormy night, Wotan the Wanderer made his way to that desolate crag near the Valkyrie's Rock, and because he was sorely troubled and harassed by all manner of doubts, he roused Erda, the Earth-Mother, from her deep sleep, and asked her how he might overcome his cares and worries.

The advice she offered was useless, and finding

that the Earth-Mother could do nothing to help him, Wotan caused her to fall into a deep slumber again, and, turning, prepared to leave the rock.

It was at this moment that Siegfried approached, for the path he had travelled by led directly to the very place where Wotan had conversed with Erda. The hero was in no way daunted by the appearance of the mighty god, whom he had never seen before, and he asked Wotan if he could direct him to the rock girdled with fire.

"How came you to know of the existence of the rock of which you speak?" questioned Wotan.

"I was told by a bird that Brünnhilde lay sleeping, guarded by a circle of fire, and I resolved to rescue her," replied the hero.

"But how are you able to understand the language of birds?" asked Wotan.

In answer to this question, Siegfried told of the forging of the Magic Sword, the fight with the dragon, and the power which came to him through tasting the dragon's blood.

"And do you not fear the fire which surrounds Brünnhilde?" asked Wotan.

"Fear!" contemptuously cried Siegfried. "I know not what it is, but I am anxious to meet with it. I am wasting my time talking to you in this manner; Brünnhilde I *must* rescue, and if you cannot direct me to the rock on which she sleeps, stand aside, and let me pass that I may push on."

"You cannot pass," cried Wotan, interposing

his Spear of Authority, "while this weapon of mine bars your way!"

"Can I not?" asked Siegfried, pressing forward. "Your spear cannot prevail against this Magic Sword of mine," and swinging round his famous blade, he dealt the god's spear such a mighty blow, that it fell to the ground, shattered in a thousand tiny pieces.

Slowly and sadly the god stooped and gathered the fragments of his broken spear, and straightening himself, cried: "Go forth, for I no longer have power to stay your progress!" And with these words he disappeared.

Seeing that his way ahead was now cleared, Siegfried pressed forward over the rocky pass with renewed energy, and fearless courage. Before he had travelled very far, he heard a rushing, roaring sound, and ere he had continued much farther he beheld the mass of flickering flames which surrounded the Valkyrie's Rock; long tongues of hissing, spluttering fire seemed to reach and lick the roof of the very skies themselves.

But the alarming sight presented by this solid wall of flame did not daunt the hero in the very least. It seemed as though the greater the danger the more fearless was his courage, for, placing his horn to his lips, he blew a rousing triumphant blast upon it, and strode fearlessly forward towards the scorching element. As he approached the flames he was amazed to notice that the fire parted, leaving

a clear pathway that he might traverse and pass through without hurt.

He reached the centre, and, gazing round, beheld a rock on which there appeared to be a mail-clad warrior asleep, over whose body there rested a heavy shield. Walking up to the rock, and removing the shield, and lifting off the helmet which covered the face of the sleeper, he perceived the features of a beautiful maiden.

"This must be the beautiful Brünnhilde, the maid I seek!" exclaimed Siegfried, with joy. "I must endeavour to awaken her."

But though he called to her repeatedly, Siegfried was unable to rouse the maiden to consciousness. Had it not been for the gentle rising and falling of her bosom, which told of regular breathing, he would have imagined her dead, so still was she.

"All my efforts have been in vain," muttered the hero sadly. "Having found the maiden I have so long and at such peril sought, I fail to waken her." And, stooping down and gazing reverently upon the fair vision before him, he felt fear for the first time, that having found his fair prize, she was, after all, to slip from his grasp; unable to restrain his love any longer, he bent over and imprinted a kiss upon the lips of the maiden.

To his joyous amazement she slowly opened her eyes to complete consciousness, sat up, and gazed around with delight, greeting the world to which she had been so long dead with a cry of gladness.



"He perceived the features of a beautiful maiden" (*see page 64*)

Then, turning round, she asked Siegfried the name of the hero who had awakened her from her deep sleep.

"Siegfried," softly answered the hero.

"Siegfried!" rapturously echoed Brünnhilde, in ecstacy. "Siegfried, the son of Sieglinde! Sieglinde, whom I knew so well in the days prior to the time I fell into my deep sleep!"

Then, looking round, she recognised her winged horse Grani, upon which she was wont in her former life to ride through the skies with the other War-Maidens, her sisters; and in the same moment she remembered that Wotan had deprived her of her godhood because of her disobedience, and that for the future she would have to live upon the earth like other women.

All this time Siegfried stood by, gazing ardently upon Brünnhilde. At last he spoke with reverence and sincerity:

"Brünnhilde, the one maid I shall ever worship, will you consent to be my bride?"

At first Brünnhilde was bewildered and fled from the hero, uttering cries of woe and begging him to leave her. But Siegfried again implored her to be his, and soon love for this fearless warrior came into her heart, and she accepted him as her destiny. Then Siegfried knelt at her feet, and pressing her hands to his lips, swore to love and honour her as his bride.

THE DOOM OF THE GODS

The Three Norns

NIGHT upon the Rock of the Valkyries. Near the rock were the three Norns, or Goddesses of Fate, weaving the Cord of Destiny and reciting the story of the past. The first Norn sang of the time when they spun their web near the World's Ash Tree, from under which welled forth the Spring of Knowledge. She told of how Wotan drank of the water, sacrificing one eye to win this privilege, and of how the god had broken a branch from the tree with which to make a shaft for his spear, after which the tree withered and died and the spring dried up.

The second Norn caught up the tale and sang of the Spear of Authority made from the branch of the Ash Tree. Of the terms of the bargain Wotan had made, and how the limits of his power were carved upon the spear; how Siegfried, the Fearless, had shattered the Spear of Authority at one mighty blow, and of the sending of warriors by Wotan to hew down the trunk of the Ash Tree and to gather the wood that it might be burned.

Then the third Norn related her tale: that Wotan sat in his palace of Valhalla attended by his numerous court of gods and goddesses; that round the walls

of the castle were piled the faggots which had been gathered from the World's Ash Tree ; when these faggots took fire the power of the gods should commence to wane.

Night was slowly passing, and the Norns found that the weaving of the Web of Fate grew more and more difficult as time crept on. While they were discussing the theft of the Gold by Alberich and of the woe entailed, the cords became entangled and frayed, and finally they snapped. With cries of dismay the Norns gathered up the broken ends and disappeared from sight just as dawn appeared over the eastern horizon.

The Departure of Siegfried

THE sun arose, driving away the mists and shadows of the night. Brünnhilde and Siegfried soon appeared, eager to be together again to talk over the strange adventures of the past and the still more glorious future which lay before them. For some while, utterly unconscious of the flight of time, Brünnhilde sat by the side of her fearless hero and heard him recount the dangers he had passed through during the course of his life right up to the time when he braved the wall of living fire that he might win her for his bride.

Simply and modestly he told her of his life with Mime in the forest ; of the forging of the Sword of Need ; of the desperate fight with the dragon ; of

his recovery of the Magic Ring and Helmet ; of his meeting with the strange person who barred his way with a spear when he was ascending the pathway to the Valkyries' Rock, and how that he had shattered this spear and routed the stranger.

When Brünnhilde heard the description of this stranger, and of the spear which he carried, she immediately realised that Siegfried must have met and vanquished the mighty Wotan. But it seemed incredible that the youthful hero should have accomplished such a deed of prowess, and, turning to him, she asked in amazement :

"Have you any idea who this man was ?"

"Not the slightest," answered Siegfried ; "he left me ere I could question him."

"Your strange opponent was none other than the mighty god Wotan, and the weapon you shattered with your sword was his Spear of Authority, with which he was wont to rule the world," said Brünnhilde. "The power of the gods is passing, and ere long Valhalla will cease to exist. Long, long ago, I was warned that these things would come to pass as a result of the troubles which followed the theft of the Treasure."

Continuing her story, Brünnhilde told Siegfried of the Rhine-Maidens and their precious charge ; of the theft of the Rhine-Gold by Alberich ; of the building of Valhalla, and the price paid to the giants upon its completion ; of the disaster which had always followed those who held possession of the

Ring; of the War-Maidens; of the story of Siegmund and Sieglinde, and how that she, Brünnhilde, had incurred the displeasure of Wotan by the help she had given the twins, and the penalty she had been forced to pay for her disobedience.

When Siegfried heard the mention of his mother's name, and of the unhappy life she had led, and the sad story of the misery of her death, his eyes filled with bitter tears, and his heart swelled with grief and loving affection at the thought of the devotion of his parent. But he was comforted to think that the fair Brünnhilde should have been the person who had done all that lay in her power to lessen the hardships of the lives of Sieglinde and Siegmund, and turning to her, his eyes moist with the tears of loving gratefulness, he whispered:

"Dearest Brünnhilde, my life shall be one long-continued effort to prove my love and devotion for you. And this Ring shall be the token of our love, and the symbol of my constant thought of you." Then, taking the Magic Ring from his own finger, he placed it reverently upon hers.

Looking fondly at the gift, Brünnhilde softly murmured:

"This I will value and treasure more than life itself, as the token of our fidelity and of our devotion to each other." Then, looking into Siegfried's face, she continued, in a firmer voice: "But my love for you must not hamper your life, nor stand in the way

of your ambitions, or I shall prove a hindrance to you instead of the help I desire to be; you must go forth into the world and gain fresh victories, knowing that I shall always be thinking and dreaming of you, and longing for the happy time when you shall return to me. To continue your life's work you must take and wear my armour, and be mounted upon my faithful steed Grani, who will serve you gladly and bear you safely through the fiercest fights for my sake. Take these things, the only gifts I have to offer you, other than my love and prayers, which shall always go with you. I will patiently await your return, surrounded by the wall of living fire, which no one but yourself may penetrate."

Sadly the hero turned away, and arrayed himself in the suit of armour which Brünnhilde had given him, and, having fastened on his Sword, hung the Magic Helmet at his belt and swung his horn around his shoulders, he turned to receive the fearless charger, and to say good-bye to the maiden he loved so dearly. Then, calling upon the gods to witness his devotion to Brünnhilde, he bade her farewell, took the reins in his hands, and led the horse down the rocky path which twisted its perilous way to the valley far below.

And high up on the mountain top remained Brünnhilde, with tear-dimmed eyes and with a heart heavy with grief, straining her ears to catch the brazen notes of a horn which came to her at intervals,

cruelly reminding her that her beloved one had at last started on his journey, while she was left alone to mourn his absence, and to long for the time when he should return to her side.

The Compact with Gunther

TIME rolled rapidly by, and each day that dawned saw Siegfried pushing forward fearlessly over hill and dale, through forest and flood, borne safely by the faithful Grani. After many days' travelling, the hero found himself upon the banks of the River Rhine, and he halted for a moment to gaze carefully at the walls and turrets of a magnificent castle which proudly crested a hill upon the opposite bank. The sight of this stronghold seemed to breathe adventure, and Siegfried determined to cross the river and demand admittance within its walls.

Dismounting from his steed, he made his way to a small boat which was moored a few yards from him. Untying the fastenings which held her to the bank, and calling to Grani to swim alongside the boat, master and horse were soon in mid-stream, steadily paddling their way towards the opposite shore.

Now this castle was the home of a powerful King named Gunther, Chief of the Gibichungs, and he ruled wisely and well over his subjects. With him there lived his beautiful sister, Gudrun, and his half-brother, Hagen, a cunning, crafty fellow and a

relation of the Nibelung dwarfs; he was never really happy except when planning and plotting evil designs.

While Siegfried was approaching the castle in the boat, Hagen was closeted with Gunther urging him to seek a wife for himself and a husband for his beautiful sister, Gudrun. This crafty fellow, who knew the story of the theft of the Rhine-Gold and the events which had followed it, told Gunther of Brünnhilde, who dwelt upon the fire-girt rock, awaiting the appearance of Siegfried, the bravest of all heroes. He suggested to the king that Siegfried would make a very desirable husband for Gudrun, while Brünnhilde would prove a most worthy bride for the king himself.

"All these plans would be excellent if they were only possible," moodily answered Gunther. "How can I win Brünnhilde if I cannot pass the wall of fire? And even if we had Siegfried here—which we have not—how could I persuade him to pierce the wall of flame for *me*, when you tell me that he himself is anxious to see and woo the beautiful maiden?"

"If Siegfried were only here," cunningly replied Hagen, "I could quite easily make him carry out all our plans. I should prepare a potion and make him drink it; after that, the way would be easy, for the drink would have the effect of making him carry out all our desires."

While Gunther was turning over these matters

in his mind, watched closely by Hagen, there was suddenly carried to their ears the sound of a horn. Startled by the note of challenge, the king angrily bade Hagen to go and find out what daring warrior had the courage to challenge Gunther on his own soil. Hagen hurried to the castle walls, and shading his eyes with his hand beheld a boat, in which there stood a noble warrior clad in armour which shone like burnished gold; alongside the boat there swam a magnificent war-horse.

Hastily returning to the king, Hagen told him of the approach of the warlike stranger, and then, hurrying down to the shore, he awaited the landing of the hero. He had not to wait many moments; the boat, propelled by the powerful strokes of the mail-clad visitor, came swiftly along and soon grated on the pebbly beach.

Stepping ashore, sword in hand, and leading his horse Grani, Siegfried demanded the name of the country and of its king. Upon being told, he asked to be brought straightway to the presence of the king.

Hagen, who had recognised Siegfried, knew all about the slaying of the dragon Fafner, and had heard other stories of the hero's prowess; he hurried back to the castle to tell Gunther the name of the fearless invader of his dominions, leaving the hero to follow, accompanied by other courtiers.

Hastening into the king's presence, Hagen delivered his message.

"Our fearless visitor is none other than the hero Siegfried of whom I have already spoken. He it is who slew the terrible dragon Fafner, so securing the Magic Treasure. On that occasion some of the dragon's blood splashed upon him, the effect being that he is now not only able to understand the songs of birds, but no weapons can harm him. He is the bravest warrior of all time, and none but he can pierce the wall of fire and reach Brünnhilde. Would not this hero make an excellent husband for your beautiful sister? It behoves us to receive such a man with high honours, for we certainly cannot afford to offend such a fierce warrior."

Acting upon this advice, Gunther went forth to meet Siegfried, and, coming up to him, inquired his name.

"My name is Siegfried," proudly answered the hero, as he saluted the king, "and I am ready to meet in mortal combat anyone who denies my right to land upon these shores."

"I have come to welcome you," said Gunther, "and not to fight with you. The fame of Siegfried's prowess has reached my ears, and I would beg of you to be my guest for a few days."

Siegfried gladly accepted the invitation, and, handing over his steed Grani to Hagen, he followed Gunther into the castle. Hagen, having tended Grani's wants, turned his attention to the preparation of the potion of which he had already spoken to the king, for he was anxious that no

time should be wasted in the carrying out of his wicked plans.

In the meanwhile, Gunther and Siegfried had been so charmed with each other that they had sworn friendship. Siegfried had sworn that in return for Gunther's friendship and kindness to him, he would use his Sword and horse Grani in the king's service. He was regretting that he had no greater gift to present to Gunther, when Hagen entered the hall with the words :

"No greater gift? What of the Magic Treasure? Surely that is a greater gift?"

"All I took of that Treasure," answered Siegfried, "were this Helmet which I carry at my belt, and a Ring which is now worn by the lady to whom I gave it."

"But the Helmet at your belt is of enormous value," said Hagen. "Do you not know that by wearing it, you have the power of becoming invisible and of changing your shape?"

Siegfried was surprised beyond words to hear this news about the Helmet he carried, but before he could reply to Hagen the door opened and the Princess Gudrun, sister of the king, entered the hall in which they were seated. In her hands she bore a tray upon which was a cup containing the poisonous draught Hagen had prepared; this potion, which was intended for the hero, would drive from his mind all memory of the past, and compel him to fall in love with the first woman he saw after

drinking it. Advancing to Siegfried's side, she bade him welcome to the land in which he found himself, and invited him to partake of the refreshment she had to offer.

Unconscious of the danger he ran, Siegfried reached and took the cup in his hands, and before drinking, silently pledged himself to the memory of his beloved Brünnhilde.

As soon as he had drained the vessel, the cunning poison began to take effect; his whole memory of the past faded away, and as he looked up and rested his eyes upon Gudrun, he fell violently in love with her, though of course he could not remember that it was she who had offered him the poisoned draught. Turning to the king, he eagerly begged to be told the name of the fair lady who stood before him.

"The lady is the Princess Gudrun, my sister," answered Gunther.

"Your sister," repeated the hero. "I thought that maybe she was your wife."

"I am unmarried," replied the king. "There is but one woman in the world I would desire to make my queen, though I fear I shall never succeed in my wish."

"It is right and proper that the king of the realm should take a wife," said Siegfried. "Why do you fear failure in approaching the lady you desire to wed?"

"The lady I would wish to win is surrounded by a wall of living fire," answered the king, "and this

wall of fire can only be penetrated by the man who does not know what fear is."

"And how is this lady named?" asked Siegfried.

"She is called Brünnhilde," replied the king. "She is the only woman I wish to wed, and I fear she will never become my bride."

At the mention of Brünnhilde's name it was clear to all who stood about him that the Cup of Forgetfulness had done its work thoroughly, for the hero had completely lost all remembrance of his former acts and of his love for Brünnhilde. Turning to the king, he said:

"I am eager to enter into a bond with you, and I trust you will look upon my suit with favour. I will penetrate this wall of living fire and bring the maiden Brünnhilde to you if you will consent to me taking the Princess Gudrun for my wife when I have carried out this plan."

"I gladly agree to your terms," answered Gunther, eagerly; "but if you set out to fetch Brünnhilde to me you must assume my shape. That is easily done by means of the Magic Helmet which you carry. Do you still agree?"

"Agree!" exclaimed the hero. "I would do and dare anything for the sake of the beautiful Princess, your sister!"

Springing to their feet, king and hero clasped hands and swore a solemn oath of eternal friendship and brotherhood, and then departed to make the

necessary preparations for their journey on the morrow to the fire-girt rock in search of Brünnhilde.

The Visit of Valtrauta

AFTER the departure of Siegfried, Brünnhilde was lonely and depressed at his absence from her side. The only happiness she had to look forward to was the return of her lover, and all her days were spent in thoughts of him, and in weaving strange and beautiful fancies round the fearless hero who had won her for his bride.

One day, as she sat near the Valkyries' Rock, thinking of her absent lover, she heard a rushing sound from the clouds above her, and, looking round, was amazed to see a sister Valkyrie flying towards her, mounted upon a winged horse. In a twinkling she had reached the rock, and the sisters were gladly embracing each other and uttering warm words of greeting.

These over, Brünnhilde asked her sister Valtrauta (for that was the Valkyrie's name) what had induced her to visit the earth, for by doing so she ran a great risk of incurring the anger of Wotan.

"Alas!" cried Valtrauta, with great emotion, "Wotan is a changed being, and appears indifferent to everything. No longer does he send the War-Maidens to battle. He sits silent and alone in Valhalla. Some time ago he went about the world alone, and gained the title of 'The Wanderer.' He

returned quite recently with his dread Spear of Authority shattered to splinters, and since that time he has been a different being. Wotan has told me of the doom that threatens the gods unless the Ring is restored to the Rhine-Maidens. I came, therefore, with all speed, dear sister, to beg of you to do this thing, and so avert the dreadful calamity which overshadows us."

Brünnhilde listened patiently to all Valtrauta had to say, but she refused to give up the precious Ring.

"I will not give it up," she answered firmly. "This Ring is Siegfried's gift to me, a token of our love, and I will not part with it—rather would I lose life itself than lose this precious trinket."

"Unless you return the Ring to the Rhine-Maidens," said Valtrauta, sadly, "the home of the gods will be destroyed."

"Valhalla may crash to ruins," answered Brünnhilde, "but I shall not give up the Ring! Valhalla does not interest me, but the love of Siegfried is my most treasured possession. Neither god nor man can deprive me of that, and you may tell Wotan so."

"Then the gods are doomed!" cried Valtrauta, and seeing that all her efforts were in vain, the Valkyrie sadly mounted her horse and in despair flew quickly away and was soon lost to sight among the clouds which floated over the mountain-tops.

* * * * *

Alone once more, Brünnhilde's thoughts soon turned again to Siegfried. Ere long, to her joyous surprise, she heard the welcome notes of the hero's horn, telling her of his approach, and, springing to her feet in ecstasy, she eagerly awaited his coming. All around her the flames burned brightly and fiercely. Suddenly they parted, and she rushed forward to greet her lover.

A man appeared through the parted fires; but, to Brünnhilde's dismay, she did not recognise her visitor. Had she known it, the stranger was Siegfried, who, by the wearing of the Magic Helmet, had assumed the shape and form of Gunther, and he spoke with Gunther's voice. She shrank from him in horror as he approached, and demanded to know his reason for his presence upon the fire-girt rock.

"I am King Gunther," answered he, "and have travelled all the way from my own land to seek you and to ask you to be my bride."

"I am betrothed to the hero Siegfried," said Brünnhilde, "and can wed no one else."

"The hero Siegfried?" echoed the disguised warrior. "Why, he is promised to a lady of my family. But we are wasting time——"

"Stand off!" cried Brünnhilde, holding aloft the Ring to protect herself. "By this token I command you to leave me immediately, or evil will befall you!"

Undaunted by her threatening manner, he sprang

Gunther

forward, and after a fierce struggle roughly wrested the Ring from her hand, crying :

"Now I command you by the fear and might of this magic token to come with me without further delay !"

To his amazement she yielded readily to his demand, and with trembling steps prepared to follow wheresoever he might lead. Poor Brünnhilde ! All her strength was torn from her when she lost the Ring ; the whole world seemed to reel beneath her, and even the gods had forgotten her.

In the meantime, Siegfried, overjoyed at the ease with which he had accomplished his object for Gunther, and unconscious of the tragic grief which oppressed the maiden, led her down the mountain-path to a spot where the real Gunther himself impatiently awaited their coming. In a flash, by the aid of the Magic Helmet, the hero disappeared and the king himself confronted the maiden. He commanded her to mount a horse which was tethered near at hand, and soon the party set out at a fast pace towards the home of the Gibichungs.

The Meeting of Siegfried and Brünnhilde

AFTER the departure of Gunther and Siegfried, Hagen had been far from idle. He had sent for his father, Alberich, to come to him, and the dwarf having arrived, this evil pair spent their time plotting and planning how to regain the lost Treasure.

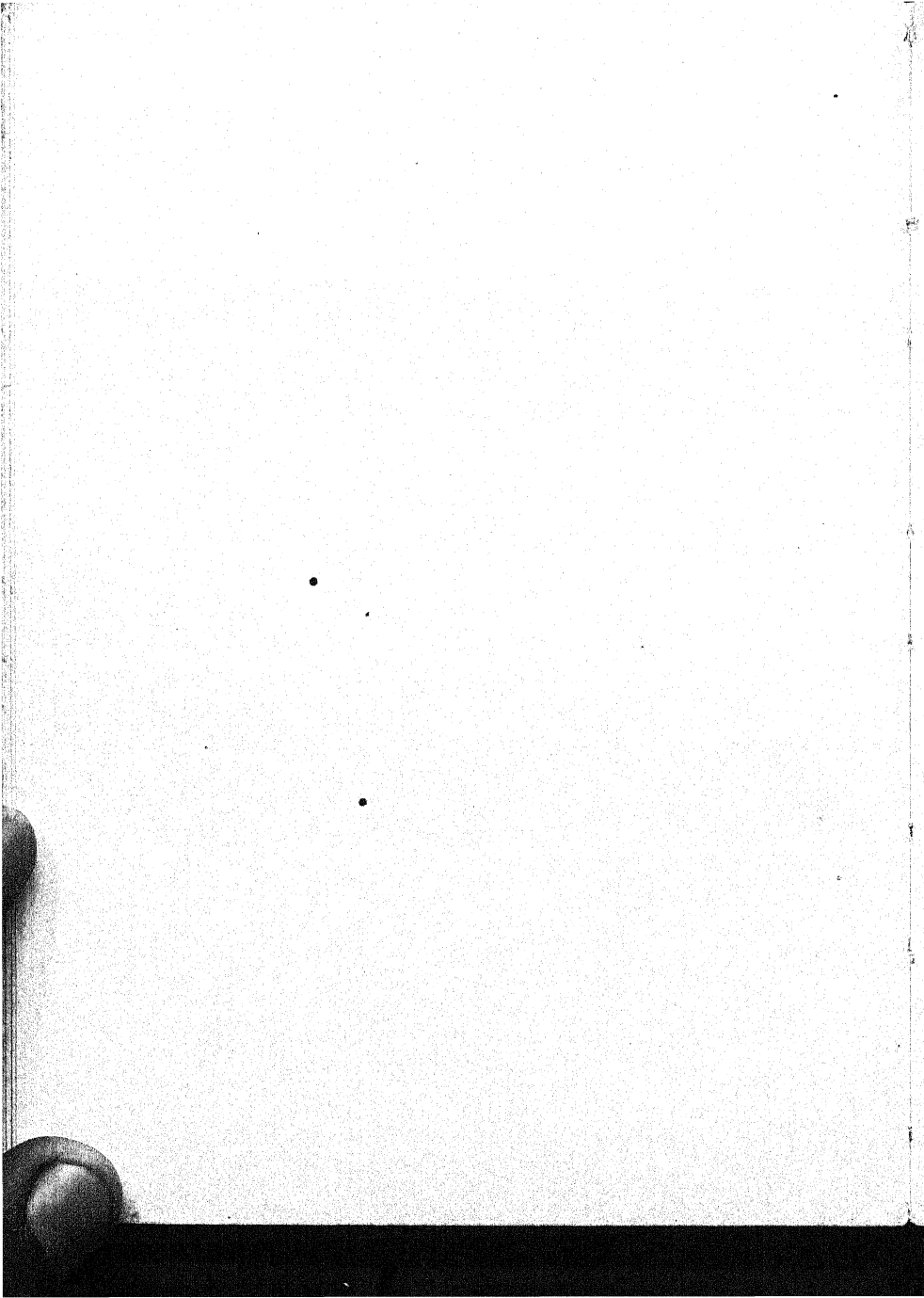
As dawn approached, Alberich disappeared, and with the first warm rays of the rising sun Siegfried was seen returning alone from his quest to the Valkyries' Rock. He roused Hagen, who had fallen asleep, and informed him that by the aid of the Magic Helmet he had managed to hurry on ahead, leaving the king and Brünnhilde to follow. At the same moment the Princess Gudrun entered the hall, and joyfully Siegfried approached her and announced that, having fulfilled the terms of his promise to the king, he claimed her for his bride. Then he proceeded to tell Gudrun and Hagen of his visit to the Valkyries' Rock, and how, disguised as Gunther, he had conquered Brünnhilde.

As he came to the end of his story, the sound of horns told of the approach of the king and his bride. Gudrun commanded Hagen to assemble all their vassals that they might accord a fitting welcome to the royal couple, who were returning; and as soon as Brünnhilde and the king arrived the air was rent with a thousand uproarious cries of welcome and with the din of the clashing of arms. Gunther, leading Brünnhilde, landed, and advanced towards Siegfried, Gudrun, and Hagen, who waited to greet them.

At sight of her hero-lover, Brünnhilde seemed changed to stone with terror and amazement, and in trembling accents she murmured his name, "Siegfried—Siegfried!" but to her dismay the hero did not recognise her. The tragic horror of the situation



"Gunther, leading Brünnhilde, landed, and advanced towards Siegfried" (see page 82)



overwhelmed her, and, a dumb faintness creeping over her, she swayed and fell into Siegfried's arms.

Gently he raised her and bore her to a couch, and then, beckoning to the king, he bade him approach, for his bride was unwell. As the king made his way toward the couch, Siegfried, with soothing words, did all he could to comfort the Royal bride, and pointing out Gunther, said to Brünnhilde :

"See, there is your future husband making his way to your side ; now you will soon be well !"

As the hero pointed out the king, Brünnhilde saw that Siegfried wore the Magic Ring upon his finger, and raising herself on the couch, cried in a loud and distressed voice :

"His Ring ! Siegfried's Ring ! How came you to be wearing my hero's Ring ?"

But of course, Siegfried, who was all unconscious of the meaning of her remarks, imagined that her wild words were due to the fact that she was over-tired by her long journey. Frantic with grief and anger, Brünnhilde demanded an explanation from Gunther. Unable to get an answer from the king, she turned once again to Siegfried, and in shrill, indignant tones, accused him of stealing the magic token.

But the hero only shook his head in a dazed way.

"The Ring ? What was this Ring ? Surely I have heard of it before ? Did I not kill a dragon, and so earn it ?"

In quick succession these and many other

thoughts passed rapidly through his bewildered brain, and just in the midst of all the uproar the oily voice of Hagen was heard :

“Come, come ; let us hence to the feast ; let us eat and rest, and we can discuss these matters when we are refreshed.”

Glad of the opportunity thus offered of dealing with a difficult situation, and quick to seize it, the king commanded his heralds to blow a fanfare upon their horns, summoning his courtiers to the feast, and, with Brünnhilde at his side, he passed into the castle, followed by his guests.

* * * * *

As Brünnhilde passed into the banqueting hall, she cast a loving glance toward Siegfried, but finding that all his attention and care were for the Princess Gudrun, her love changed to furious hate, and she determined to be avenged upon the hero for the insult and disgrace he had heaped upon her. But before the king and his guests she concealed her anger, though beneath her joyous exterior burned the slow fire of bitter hate, and her heart called loudly for revenge. Slyly watching her was the crafty Hagen ; he knew the bitterness which gnawed at her heart, and he smiled cunningly to himself as he thought how smoothly all his plans were developing.

After the feast the guests gave themselves up to the enjoyment of music, games, and conversation. Hagen made his way to Brünnhilde's side, and

gradually he led the conversation round to Siegfried. Upon mention of the hero's name, the features of Brünnhilde grew dark with passion as she said :

"I do not wish to have his name mentioned to me ; he is the most deceitful man alive !"

"Deceitful !" echoed Hagen, in well-feigned surprise. "Surely not ? You must have reasons for making such a charge, and I should like to hear them. If this man is the traitor you say he is, we must prevent his marriage with the Princess Gudrun."

"Siegfried is a lying trickster !" loudly denounced Brünnhilde. "He was my betrothed husband, yet he obtained the Ring from me by fraud ! I call upon the gods to visit the power of their wrath upon this deceiver !"

Hearing this sudden outburst of passion, the small crowd which had gathered round her looked to the hero for a denial of these charges, and he swore by his sword that her words were not true. Brünnhilde, however, repeated her challenge, and accused him of lying, and hearing this charge the king and the Princess Gudrun called upon Siegfried to prove that he was not guilty of the crimes with which he had been charged. The hero asked for a weapon upon which he might make a solemn vow that he was innocent, and the wicked Hagen offered his spear for this purpose. Siegfried readily stepped forward, and in clear tones cried :

"Upon this shining spear-point I make a holy

vow that I have not been guilty of any of these things. I call you all to witness my words, and if I have spoken untruthfully I trust this spear may be used to slay me ! ”

As he concluded, Brünnhilde came forward, and upon the same spear swore that Siegfried was lying ; but the hero still believed that she was suffering from some delusion, and, undismayed by the terrible charges made against him, he called upon his friends to continue their enjoyment ; accompanied by the Princess Gudrun, he walked away, leaving Brünnhilde, Gunther, and Hagen together.

This was the opportunity Hagen had long hoped for. Brünnhilde, in a frenzy of despair, felt that some dreadful spell of enchantment must have been laid upon Siegfried ; but, remembering her vow of vengeance, she excitedly called for a weapon which she might dedicate to the destruction of Siegfried. Hagen again eagerly offered his spear, but the maiden declared that it would be worthless and incapable of harming the hero. Upon hearing this, the evil Hagen begged her to say why the weapon would fail in its purpose, and he learned that Brünnhilde had cast her magic spells over Siegfried, so that no wounds could harm him ; there was only one place where no spell had been laid, and that spot was on the hero's back ; she had laid no spell there, for she knew that Siegfried would never turn his back to any foe. If he were struck in the back, then he might be slain.

Calling to the king, Hagen declared that as Sieg-

fried had broken his vow of eternal friendship and brotherhood, only one punishment was possible to wipe out the disgrace of the broken vow, and that was the hero's death.

And so the three plotters put their heads together and decided that the hero should be slain; they agreed to arrange that the wicked murder should be carried out in a remote corner of the forest which lay near the castle, so that after his death it might be declared that Siegfried had been killed when hunting a wild boar; in this way all suspicions would be allayed.

The Death of Siegfried

THE next day dawned, and everyone was busily preparing for the hunting party which had been arranged by the king. Each member of the party was free to wander where he liked in search of sport, but at noon all were to meet at an appointed place to partake of a meal and to declare what success had been met with.

When all were assembled the hunters moved off and were soon lost sight of in the thickets of the forest. Siegfried, mounted upon the famous steed, Grani, almost immediately roused a wild boar from its lair, and giving chase, followed his quarry for some considerable distance, when he suddenly lost sight of it among the dense undergrowth.

Looking about him to discover his whereabouts,

and to find a means of returning to the other hunters, he found himself on the banks of the River Rhine, and, being hot and thirsty, he dismounted and stooped to drink of the cool, clear water.

As he leaned over the river's bank, he was surprised to hear the sounds of maidens' voices singing a strangely beautiful song, and before he had recovered from his first amazement, he beheld three handsome water-nymphs swimming about in circles in the river.

They were the Rhine-Maidens, though, of course, Siegfried did not know them. He called to them, and asked them if they could direct him to the place where the wild boar which he had hunted was hidden.

"If you will give us the Ring you are wearing," said they, "we will tell you where the wild boar is."

"Ah! I am unwilling to part with this Ring," said Siegfried. "I value it very highly, for I only gained it after a fierce fight. I slew a dragon to obtain it, and a wild boar seems a poor exchange for such a valuable prize as this."

Hearing these words, the Rhine-Maidens mocked him, and taunted him with meanness, much to the hero's amusement; but still he would not part with the token. He watched them swim to and fro beneath the water, and had almost made up his mind to throw the Ring to them when one of the maidens swam close to him, and raising herself half out of the water, cried in a solemn voice:

"Take warning, noble Siegfried! The Ring you hold carries with it an evil spell, and it would be far better for you to give it to us and so avert the trouble which is bound to come to you otherwise."

"Then," replied Siegfried, fearless of all danger, "if evil goes with it I shall keep it. Now that I know that a dreadful spell overshadows it, I think I shall find it much more interesting and valuable."

"You don't know what you do!" cried the maiden. "This Ring you wear was welded from the Rhine-Gold which was stolen by Alberich the dwarf; evil fortune follows whosoever shall own it; if you do not return the Ring to us your doom is sealed, and nothing can save you!"

Siegfried, who held the Ring in his hand, now slipped it on his finger again as he heard these words, and said:

"I am more determined than ever to retain it since hearing your story, for I am not in the least daunted by the threats you have made."

"Farewell!" called back the maiden. "A noble woman will restore the Ring to us one day," and, resuming their song, they swam away as the hero, mounted on Grani, threaded his way through the forest.

When he had ridden some little distance he heard the sound of horns, and, answering the calls, he soon reached the spot where the rest of the party were engaged at luncheon. Gunther, Brünnhilde, and Hagen, beside a host of courtiers, were already

seated, and as they saw Siegfried approach, and noted that he had not succeeded in killing any game, they taunted him upon his failure in the chase. As a punishment it was resolved that he should amuse the party by relating to them some of his adventures and fierce fights.

Siegfried willingly agreed to the proposal; but, weary and hot from riding, he begged a cup of wine to quench his thirst. Hagen hurriedly poured out the liquid, and as he did so added a few drops of a drug which should cause the memory of the hero to reawaken so that he should recall some of the incidents of his past life.

The hunting party gathered round, and Siegfried began to tell them of his young days and of his life with Mime, the dwarf, in the forest; of the dragon's lair in the forest, and of the forging of the Sword of Need; of the fierce fight with Fafner, whom he slew and so secured the Ring and the Magic Helmet; of how, after tasting the dragon's blood, which splashed upon him, he was straightway enabled to understand the songs of the birds, and of how he was able to understand the bird which warned him of Mime's treachery.

After a slight pause for further refreshment, he continued his story, and told them of the death of Mime; how the bird told him of the lovely Brünnhilde, who should remain asleep until awakened by the fearless hero who should penetrate the wall of fire which surrounded her; how he set forth to find

this maiden, and after many perilous adventures won his way through the fire to her side, awakened her, and claimed her as his bride.

As he came to the end of his tale, he sprang to his feet with a joyous cry, for he had recognised Brünnhilde, and with arms outstretched moved gladly towards her; but ere he could reach her side he fell with a groan, mortally wounded by the spear which the evil Hagen had driven into his back.

After his wicked act of murder, Hagen coolly turned and walked away, and was soon lost sight of in the forest. The dying hero lay where he had fallen, his life's blood rapidly ebbing away and staining the ground about him. The beautiful Brünnhilde, her hatred and desire for vengeance gone, and her love awakened, tenderly supported her lover's head in her lap, and made wild, but vain, endeavours to stanch the blood which gushed from the wound.

Siegfried, with fast glazing eyes, looked lovingly up to her and softly called, "Brünnhilde—I—am—still—devoted—to you!"

Overwhelmed with anguish, Brünnhilde gently caressed him, and whispered:

"Dear Siegfried, forgive me! I have loved you dearly. All the trouble we have passed through has been caused through the evil scheming of others. Look up at me, dear Siegfried, and tell me you will soon be well to share a happy life with me!"

But her appeal came too late. With a last despairing effort the wounded hero raised himself in her arms, and with the scarcely audible utterance of the words, "Brünnhilde—Brünnhilde," fell back dead. The noble Siegfried had fought his last fight—his earthly troubles were over.

* * * * *

Night had fallen as the vassals of the king raised the dead Siegfried's body and bore it in solemn state to the Hall of the Gibichungs. Even Nature seemed to wear a garb of mourning—the soft rays of the moon broke fitfully through the dark masses of cloud which scudded across the skies; wreaths of mist rose from the Rhine and swept dismally to and fro; and the gentle wail of the wind among the trees supplied a fitting dirge at the passing of the corpse of the warrior whose earthly pilgrimage had been brought to such a tragic and abrupt close.

The Return of the Ring

HORROR-STRICKEN at the thought of the part he had played in the wicked plot which led to Siegfried's murder, Gunther stood and looked sorrowfully down upon the dead hero's body, which had been placed in the hall of the Castle. Near him stood the Princess Gudrun and Brünnhilde, both weeping and overpowered with their burden of grief. The Princess angrily turned to her brother and charged him with being the cause of the murder, but he

denied her charge and told her that Hagen had committed the murder.

At that moment Hagen himself entered the hall, and being accused of the crime, boldly asserted that he had slain the hero as a breaker of oaths. Brünnhilde then accused them all of plotting together to bring about Siegfried's death, and Gunther sorrowfully admitted that they were joined in conspiracy. He proceeded to tell her how they had contrived to get the hero to drink of the Cup of Forgetfulness, not knowing that Siegfried was Brünnhilde's promised lover; under the influence of the drug the hero had carried out all their designs and was in no way to blame for the part he had been compelled to play. All the trouble was due to the original evil plotting of the wicked Hagen.

Hagen then stepped forward and demanded that as he had slain Siegfried, the Ring was his by right of conquest and the spoil of war. The king, however, refused to allow him to remove the token from the dead warrior's finger, and from quarrelling they fell to fighting, during which Gunther was slain. Eagerly Hagen stepped forward to seize the precious Ring, when, to the horror of everyone present, Siegfried's arm raised itself slowly aloft as if in warning, and Hagen shrank from the hall in terror.

With his departure Brünnhilde commanded the vassals to take up the bier and bear the body of her dead lover to the river's side, where fitting

funeral ceremonies might be performed for the hero. Having reached the bank of the river, she directed the erection of a huge funeral pyre, and when this was completed the corpse was placed upon the top of the faggots which had been piled up. Then removing the Ring from Siegfried's finger, she called for a torch to set fire to the pile of brushwood and faggots upon which rested the dead body.

As the fierce flames swept upward and licked hungrily at the fuel, Brünnhilde commanded that the steed Grani be brought to her. This was done, and she mounted her old favourite and, turning to her hearers, declared that she was about to ride into the flames and join her lover, carrying with her the Ring which had brought so much trouble in its wake. By doing this the fire would cleanse the token of its evil properties. After calling upon the Rhine-Maidens to come and claim the Ring, she urged the faithful Grani forward and soon horse and rider were enveloped in smoke and fire and lost sight of among the mass of roaring flame.

The fire burned up more fiercely than ever, but finally the whole mass collapsed. Then there rolled up from the river a great wave, on the crest of which rode the Rhine-Maidens; the wave swept forward over the burning funeral pyre, extinguishing the flames.

At sight of this, Hagen, who had approached, sprang madly forward with a howl of despair in his efforts to seize the Ring from the ashes, but he

failed to reach it, and instead of recovering the coveted token was dragged under the waters by the Rhine-Maidens in making the attempt.

One of the maidens, Flosshilda by name, found the Ring and held it triumphantly aloft as the tide swept back to its accustomed bed, leaving no trace of the funeral pyre, the dead hero, Brünnhilde, or Hagen.

* * * * *

As the waters of the Rhine flowed away, the distant sky became warmly tinged with a fiery glow. Far, far off among the clouds which swept the face of the heavens a dreadful sight met the gaze of all beholders. Valhalla, surrounded by hungry flames of fire, was fiercely burning. The doom of the gods had come at last, the prophecy was fulfilled; the old order of things was passing away, purified by the cleansing fires, and from out the dead ashes should arise a better, grander, and more glorious world.



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